







TO TELL THE TRUTH

Dione Neutra

Interviewed by Lawrence Weschler

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

Dione Niedermann Neutra, wife of architect Richard Neutra, was once described by one of her husband's associates as "a pathological truth-teller." He was not implying that she was always necessarily "correct" or that she had a monopoly on "the truth," but that she always "spoke her mind" and tried to withhold nothing of importance in dealing with an issue or setting the record straight. This was certainly the case in my dealings with this remarkable woman in the years of researching and writing Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture: A Biography and History (Oxford University Press, 1982). I find the same qualities emerging in these taped interviews that Lawrence Weschler conducted with Mrs. Neutra in 1978.

Dione Niedermann was born in 1901 in Munich. Her father's occupation as an engineer required the family to move about frequently, though both parents' Swiss-German origins and loyalties kept them as close as possible to the Zurich area. In 1919, she met Richard Neutra (1892-1970), then a struggling young architect recuperating in Switzerland from wartime illness and depression. In 1921, the couple married and Dione joined Richard in Berlin, where he worked for the great architect Erich Mendelsohn. In 1923, Neutra emigrated to America, and Dione joined him in 1924 after the birth of their first child. After short stays in Chicago and at

Taliesin, Wisconsin, with Frank Lloyd Wright, the Neutras moved to Los Angeles in 1925, where Neutra established an office and practiced until his death in 1970. Through all this time, Dione remained his constant companion and confidante, while performing multiple roles from wife and mother to secretary and office manager. This led to the frequent neglect of her musical career, though following Neutra's death, she was able to concentrate on this important part of her life.

These interviews richly detail the Neutras' life experiences. In a few cases, Mrs. Neutra's memory at the time of the interview conflicts with certain documents of her own and her husband's. She seems, for example, not to recall very much of their interest in, and involvement with, the European refugees and exiles of the 1930s and of World War II in general, though her letters and diaries remind us that they were involved with those issues at that time. I wish she and Weschler had talked more about Neutra's buildings, but I appreciate the amount of attention given to personal and social issues. I have found the interviews useful in writing my book and I am certain that they will continue to be so for future cultural and architectural historians.

--Thomas S. Hines
Professor
Department of History and
School of Architecture
and Urban Planning, UCLA
February 1982

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Lawrence Weschler, assistant editor, Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A., Philosophy and Cultural History, UCSC.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Mrs. Neutra's home in Silver Lake.

Dates: April 10, July 10, 14, 18, 21, August 2, 3, 9, 14, 18, September 1 (video), and 27, 1978.

Time of day, length of sessions, total number of recording hours: Sessions began at eleven o'clock in the morning and lasted on average one and a half hours. Fourteen hours of conversation were recorded.

Persons present during interview: Mrs. Neutra and Weschler. Bernard Galm and Rebecca Andrade were present during the video session.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

The Program had already recorded the reminiscences of several Central European emigres--Gustave Arlt, Marta Feuchtwanger, William Melnitz, Lily Toch (the interviewer's grandmother)--so that when the name of Dione (Mrs. Richard) Neutra was proposed, the idea seemed a likely one. UCLA had the Neutra archive (housed just a few steps from the Program's Powell Library door), and Thomas S. Hines, professor in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning, was already embarked on his book about Neutra.

Hines gave some direction to Weschler's research. In return for his generous assistance, he was permitted to make use of the interview transcripts before they were fully processed.

In their initial interview sessions, Mrs. Neutra read from notes she had prepared. Weschler felt that this was not the kind of response he had hoped for and persuaded her to extemporize. There was material that seemed to be cause for concern; as Weschler felt that it was making the interviewee nervous, he suggested that one session be set aside for the airing of material that could be restricted for a long period.

The video session was one of the first "on location" videos recorded by the Program.

EDITING:

Editing was done by the interviewer. He checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation and paragraphing and the verification and spelling of person and place names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor for clarity have been bracketed.

Mrs. Neutra reviewed and approved the edited transcripts, answering the editor's queries. At this time and on several subsequent occasions, she sought to reassure herself that the material that was to be sealed had been handled in accordance with her wishes. All of Tape VIII and the first side of Tape IX are sealed as are brief passages elsewhere throughout the manuscript. All passages thus sealed are clearly marked and are separately indexed. When the period of restriction has elapsed, Tapes VIII and IX (Side One) will be bound with a table of contents and the index of all sealed material. (There is no Tape IV, Side One, or Tape VII, Side Two.)

Mitch Tuchman, principal editor, reviewed the transcript before final typing and prepared the front matter and index. Hines wrote the introduction.

The original tape recordings and edited transcript of the interview are in the University Archives and are available (with the exception of the sealed portions of the transcript and tapes on which any sealed material whatsoever was recorded) under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the University. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

Readers are encouraged to make use of the Neutra archive in the UCLA Library and to take note of Hines's Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Neutra himself was the author of more than a dozen books.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

APRIL 10, 1978

WESCHLER: The way we usually begin these interviews is to get a sense of the background of the interviewee. Perhaps you can start by talking about when and where you were born and your early family history.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very well. I was born on April 14, 1901, in Munich, Germany, and my maiden name was Niedermann. My ancestors on my father's side came from Zurich, Switzerland, and there is even a house yet in which they lived, in the old part of town. My grandfather [Alfred Niedermann] was a poet, a painter, a writer, and a xylographer (that means a woodcutter), and he illustrated Brehm's Tierleben, which was a very famous research book, and many other publications. My grandmother [Ida Niedermann] was a singer and a pianist, and my father [Alfred] was an engineer and a very excellent amateur pianist. When I was one year old they moved to Zurich, and I really grew up in Zurich and its surroundings.

WESCHLER: What were they doing in Munich when you were born?

DIONE NEUTRA: My father had a position with a firm in Munich. And my grandfather lived for thirty years in Munich. My mother [Lilly Antoinette] came from north

Germany, and my grandfather was very appalled that my father would marry a German girl, and at that, a girl who had no money. So that was a difficult period for my mother.

WESCHLER: What was her family background?

DIONE NEUTRA: My mother's maiden name was Müller. Her father [Ludwig Müller] had a wholesale business in Leer, Ostfriesland, for beer. This was not an artistic family, and so my mother was delighted, because although she sang in her early years, I never heard her sing, or I never heard her play the piano; but she was very much interested in the arts, and she really became the hub of the whole family.

I was the eldest of four girls. At age six I started with piano lessons. When I was ten, we lived in Kilchberg, which is a very lovely little lake community, about half an hour by boat from Zurich. This was the first time that the family owned their own house. We had a huge garden, and each girl had a task to weed a long path in that garden. We all hated it, but I loved my mother, and so I felt that I should pretend that I liked it. So I sang with full abandon, and my parents told me, standing at the window, "Oh, she has really a very nice voice. Later on she should have singing lessons." And that happened when I was eighteen.

When I was fourteen, I received a cello for my birthday, because my father had always difficulties to get cellos for his chamber music, and he played, oh, sometimes every evening with some students. One day, two of the students approached my mother and said, "You have such a big house, why don't you rent us some rooms, and then we can play chamber music to our hearts' content?" And one of these young men, Walter Kreis, a chemist, became my first cello teacher.

I had a most wonderful childhood. I remember it with the greatest pleasure. Perhaps I should describe to you a Christmas, how we celebrated Christmas. At the first of December my mother would make a clock out of cardboard with twenty-four numbers, and each day, the girl who gave her the most pleasure could move the hand of the clock one day nearer Christmas. And when we came home from school, sometimes there would be the smell of burned needles in the house, and we would find little bags of cookies on the stairway, and then we knew the Christ child had come.

On the first of December, we each wrote a letter to the Christ child telling him what our wishes were, and then we pasted that letter outside the window, and the next morning it was gone. So we knew that our wishes had been heeded. I remember, for instance, we had a

huge box with our toys, where we kept our toys, and of course by the end of the year, the horse had no tail, and the doll had no head or no arms, and everything was in bad disarray. So I remember my mother telling me once (by that time I was in first grade), she said, "You know, I wouldn't be at all surprised if one day the Christ child would come and take that box away with all your toys." We said, "Ha, ha, ha, ha, that box is much too heavy; how could he take that box away?" Well, I remember coming home from school one day and going into my room, and a cold blast of air hit me; the window was wide open, and the box with all the toys was gone. So, of course, we were just devastated.

We never saw the Christmas tree. That tree was hidden--or we didn't know it existed. There was one closed room, which was always locked, and we tried to look through the keyhole, but of course we couldn't see anything, and sometimes we heard some rustlings behind the door. Every evening we would all sit together around the table, with an elaborate construction of trays (because we all were making Christmas presents for each other), and my father would read to us; I remember that he read the whole of David Copperfield, by Dickens, and many other stories.

Then on Christmas afternoon, we all dressed up, and one thing we couldn't understand was why my father was always absent on that occasion. Well, we sat in that room, and we sang Christmas carols, and suddenly there was a bright light all around the house, and then we knew the Christ child was bringing the Christmas tree. What we didn't know was that my father was running with a flare of magnesium around the house, pretending that that was the light of the Christmas tree. We heard a tinkling of bells, and then we opened the room, and there was the Christmas tree, with real candles, and all the presents neatly arranged in piles and not put into cellophane papers and ribbons, which you have to tear apart and have a big mess afterwards; this disturbs me very much with the American Christmas. [laughter]

Anyway, in one of these Christmases here was the box which the Christ child had taken away from us, and all the beloved toys had been repaired, and the doll had a new head and a new arm and new dresses, and the horse had a tail again, and this was just absolutely wonderful. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Let me ask some questions about several factors of growing up. First of all, you mentioned Christmas. What was the religious leaning of your family, and to what extent was it at all serious?

DIONE NEUTRA: My grandfather was an atheist--atheist?--and hated church and going to church. My mother was born a Catholic, but she told me that once when she had to go to confession as, I think, an eight-year-old girl, she looked down the list of sins she could have committed, and she felt that she hadn't committed any sins. So she just picked one at random and told the priest, "I have committed adultery," because she thought that was such an interesting word. [laughter] Anyway, she soon saw behind the sham of so much of religion, and so I am very happy to say that we never went to church. But every Sunday my father would read some poems to us, and then we would take a two-hour walk in the forest, and that was like going to church; I mean, we communed with nature. First, we had a very elaborate breakfast, like a brunch, and then we went into the forest and were home by two. By that time, all the good Swiss citizens had had their lunch and streamed out into the forest, while in the morning we had had it all to ourselves.

WESCHLER: Was this general religious orientation typical of Zurich at the time, or was it unusual?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that was unusual, I think.

WESCHLER: Was he also an atheist, your father?

DIONE NEUTRA: My father, he was also an atheist. Yes.

WESCHLER: Also, can you describe your siblings? I take

it, from what I know, you didn't have any brothers. These were all sisters.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, we had no brothers, we had all sisters. My second sister Verena--I called Vreneli--was the blue-stocking of the family. She was the only one who went to high school, finished high school, and had Latin at high school. She recited marvelous poems in Latin and also in French. My third sister, Doris, learned also the piano, and both Vreneli and Doris sang. I would teach them and we would sing a terzet--what is terzetto in English?

WESCHLER: I'm not sure. "Trio" [vocal trio]?

DIONE NEUTRA: Trio would be for instrumental music. So anyway, we would sing as three voices, and very often we would learn a new song; and then on Sunday morning, we would sing it in front of my parents' bedroom, to surprise them.

WESCHLER: As part of the ceremony of Sunday?

DIONE NEUTRA: Of Sunday, that's right. And my youngest sister, Regula, was named after one of the Swiss saints, of the Zurich saints, Saint Regula, and she later became a nurse. She always wanted to be a nurse when she was a little girl, and she finally served under Patton, became a captain, and served during the world war in Europe. Later on, when she was dismissed from the army, she served as a translator in the war crimes commission,

in Germany. My sister Doris later on married an architect, Roger Girsberger, and they both became Communists. My sister died when she was twenty-nine, with pneumonia, which they couldn't treat at that time. And my sister Vreneli, when she was twelve, met a young boy from Argentina who was thirteen. They both fell in love with each other. But then the First World War broke out, so he went back to Buenos Aires, and they wrote letters to each other for eight years and got engaged in the letters. Then he came back, and we thought, oh well, that would certainly not work out, because he came from a very rich Jewish background, and we, although we were not poor, we had to be careful with our money. But they did get married, and my sister moved to Buenos Aires.

WESCHLER: And stayed in Buenos Aires?

DIONE NEUTRA: And stayed in Buenos Aires for thirty years. But then, that is a long story which doesn't belong here, I think. [laughter]

WESCHLER: OK. I also wanted to ask you about your family's general sense of Jews in Zurich. Were there Jews in Zurich?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, we had many Jewish friends. But somehow, Jews were just-- We felt they were inferior. I mean, this was just the general feeling in Switzerland, I think, although we had many Jewish friends which we

liked very much. But I don't know. This somehow was the feeling.

WESCHLER: How did that feeling get expressed? I mean, what tangible-- Can you give examples of what you meant by "inferiority"?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No. It was just a feeling; it wasn't expressed in any way. But, for instance, we lived then in a house which belonged to a professor of ophthalmology who had moved to Germany when the war broke out in 1914. They were called Allddeutsch; that means they were very anti-Semitic. But we just didn't pay any attention to that, you know, but I heard much talk about it when we met with this group.

WESCHLER: Were the Jews in Zurich rather assimilated, or were they--

DIONE NEUTRA: Very assimilated.

WESCHLER: --in a ghetto situation?

DIONE NEUTRA: Not at all, not at all.

WESCHLER: Also, I wanted just to ask you some physical descriptions of your family. Can you describe what your father and mother looked like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, my father was a very good-looking man, as was my mother. They both were a very good-looking couple. We called my father, Vaterli-- [sound interference]

WESCHLER: We're looking at pictures here of both of them.

DIONE NEUTRA: My father loved to dress up, and my sister Regula coined the words, "Du bist ein ganzer 'Damenherren.'" That means that he was a gentleman who looked as well dressed as a lady. For instance, he would have a tie and a matching handkerchief in his pocket of his suit and matching stockings. [laughter]

WESCHLER: And your mother?

DIONE NEUTRA: And my mother was very good looking and very vivacious, and she also loved to dress. And maybe I should tell you that sometimes she would-- Suddenly, one day, she would decide, "Let's celebrate that we are family." So she would cook a magnificent dinner, and we would set the table with our best china and flowers. My father put on a tuxedo and my mother would put on an evening dress, and the four girls would put on their best dresses, and then my father would make a little speech, and then each child had to perform something. My sister and I would play at four hands together and, oh, we would sing together terzets. And I would accompany my two sisters, or my sister would accompany me, and I played a piece on the cello, and she would accompany me on some of my songs. And for every Christmas and for every birthday we would prepare a one- or two-hour program for my father. But he was very, very severe. He really felt that we were a nuisance, because he was so much in love

with my mother that he felt that we took his time away from him.

WESCHLER: I was wondering also whether your father would have liked to have some sons.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, yes, each child who appeared was supposed to be a son, especially my younger sister Regula was supposed to be a son, but a son never appeared.

WESCHLER: Until Richard.

DIONE NEUTRA: Then maybe I should tell how we met--

WESCHLER: We'll talk about that in a second, but I'm just setting that up, in a way, that that's interesting, for a man who wanted a son all along, that--

DIONE NEUTRA: --that he never got a son, yes. But, you know, the male determines the sex of the child--did you know that?

WESCHLER: No, I didn't know that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: So it was his own fault--

DIONE NEUTRA: His own fault. [laughter]

WESCHLER: OK, why don't you continue with what you had prepared in terms of your--

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. I wanted to tell you about Mr. Neutra's--

WESCHLER: Well, actually, before we get there, I wanted to ask you some more questions about your background. You did give a hint of your economic circumstances.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, my father was an engineer. He was employed by a German firm who constructed gasometers, so his job was to go to the different villages and interest them to introduce gas into their community. And so he had to do a lot of traveling and was very often out of town. But he always saw to it that we lived in the country. We always had a garden. And either we lived in the country or we had a house in the city with a large garden. So that nature means a great deal to me; I'm very, very, very conscious of it, I mean, sunsets and sunrises, and I observe everything and enjoy everything.

WESCHLER: Also your cultural background, you mentioned that your grandfather was a poet. Was your father-- you've spoken of him reading poetry and so forth-- was he--

DIONE NEUTRA: He was interested in literature, and on Sundays we very often would go to the art museum and be scandalized by the modern paintings. I remember Hodler was a very famous Swiss painter, and one painting was called the Holy Hour, the Heilige Stunde, where four women sit, and we all went home, we all tried to sit and see how they could possibly sit like that. [laughter] Of course, we went to concerts, and we had a very hospitable house, and many of the opera singers would come and visit us, and then we would get opera tickets;

so at an early age we would go to the opera and to plays.

WESCHLER: Was Zurich a fairly cultured city?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, a very cultural city, yes. You know, you see during the First World War so many emigrants, like Thomas Mann, came, and--

WESCHLER: Joyce was in Zurich.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Joyce was in Zurich, that's right. Of course, my father may have met them. He sometimes went to the Cafe Odeon, and that was a cafe where many of the immigrants would meet, but they didn't come to our house; I don't remember that.

WESCHLER: Your bringing that up makes me want to ask you about Zurich during the war; what the sense of-- You were just an early teenager when the war began.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Can you describe what it was like to be in Zurich during that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, of course, in our family we were of course for the Germans. In fact, in 1914 my father lost his job with his German firm, and we had to sell our house. And all the proceeds of the house were put into Deutsche Kriegsanleihe--what is that? German war bonds?

WESCHLER: War bonds, uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: And, of course, we lost all our money,

you know, during the inflation, all the war bonds. We had nothing. So my parents had a very difficult time then, because my father had intermittent employment but not a steady employment. I remember that in, I think, 1916, he got a very good position in Vienna. He was a very imposing-looking man, and so he fooled the people who hired him, because at heart he was really a musician. He probably should have become a conductor, but at that time it was not a profession, and his father wanted him to be an engineer; but, at heart, I don't think he enjoyed it very much. So he just couldn't stand up to the competition with younger people, then, who came up. So they had a really very difficult time.

WESCHLER: For a period he was in Vienna, and then he would come back to Zurich.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, then he would come back again.

WESCHLER: Well, how was Swiss society affected by the war? You say that you were pro-German. Were there others in Zurich who were pro-French, for example?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, in the French part, of course, in the French part.

WESCHLER: Did you have fights among each other about it, or what was the general sense during the war?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't really remember. I was thirteen.

WESCHLER: Continuing talking about the war, what was it-- I'm again trying to get this sense of what it was just

like to be living in Zurich. Was there news of the war? Was that a presence in the way that obviously, for people living in Vienna, it would have been a strong presence?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes. But the main thing is that there was such an influx, you see, of immigrants that they completely lifted the very inbred Swiss society.

WESCHLER: Really. What do you mean by that? How did that affect the life?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, first, you know, all sorts of little theaters sprang up, and concerts were given, and articles appeared in the papers, so there was great enrichment for the whole community.

WESCHLER: And did you attend these various theaters and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I was thirteen. Later on, yes, I did go to operas and plays. That was very nice. And then I joined the Wandervögel. Have you heard about the Wandervögel? That was an organization--the translation would be "wandering birds"--and the idea was to explore your homeland by foot. So we would meet in the morning, and I think the longest walk I took in a day was thirty-five miles. And once my sister and I and twelve boys walked from Zurich to the Italian part of Switzerland, to Lugano. And I had fifty pounds on my back--knapsack was fifty pounds--and a guitar, and I would sing going up

and down the hills, and we would sleep in the hay with the peasants and sing for our supper and cook our supper.

WESCHLER: Twelve boys! [laughter] My goodness. What was your school situation? What subjects interested you?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. My parents felt that I should spend more time on my cello practice, so they took me out of high school after the first year. And so I had private lessons. I was an avid reader; I read the whole of Dickens, and I read the whole of Scott, in translation, of course, and, oh--I don't remember. Most of my reading happened, really, in that period. And he did not teach mathematics, so I had to take a cram course, because at the end of each year each pupil who had private lessons had to take a state examination. I have the most horrible memory of that, and for this reason my mathematics are very, very poor; in fact, I've forgotten how to divide and to multiply, I can only add and subtract. [laughter]

WESCHLER: That must make life rather difficult for you.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, because I use it so little that whenever somebody shows it to me, I have forgotten it again at the next occasion. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Was that common for kids to be taken out of school?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that wasn't common.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: That wasn't common. But I then started lessons with the best cello teacher in town, who was the first cellist of the symphony orchestra.

WESCHLER: What was his name?

DIONE NEUTRA: Fritz Reitz. Many years later, oh, forty years later, I visited him when he was retired and lived in the Italian part of Switzerland and sang and, you know, I accompanied myself on the cello (to which we will come later). I sang him some of my cello songs, and he was absolutely delighted with it.

WESCHLER: I can just mention as a footnote to this that Fritz Reitz was also forty years later a friend of the Tochs, my grandparents.

DIONE NEUTRA: Is that so? So. Isn't that interesting. He was a wonderful man. I remember once, in fact, I was infatuated with him, and so one day my two sisters and I went to his apartment and gave him a Ständchen--how would you say Ständchen in English? You know, when you sing in front of somebody's window?

WESCHLER: A serenade.

DIONE NEUTRA: Serenade. We serenaded him and he was very touched.

WESCHLER: Can you tell us a little more about your own music lessons, what that consisted of.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think I stopped piano lessons in my

eighth year, but I always practiced and--no, I guess it was in my tenth year. I still had piano lessons when we lived in Kilchberg, but my singing lessons I didn't start until I was eighteen. But the cello lessons, I practiced many hours a day.

WESCHLER: And that was an important part of your life?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that was an important part of my life.

WESCHLER: Let me just check something here. [tape recorder turned off]

OK, let's see here. The other question I wanted to ask you is just a sense of your social presence in your late teens. I mean, were you a very social person, or were you a rather solitary soul?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, because I belonged to this youth movement, you know. We had weekly meetings where we would sing together, we would learn new songs, and I was not particularly gregarious, I don't think. And then we, you know, we had three sisters, so we had lots of activities together.

WESCHLER: Did you have many friends that have lasted beyond your childhood?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, but two years ago, when I was in Europe, I participated in a class reunion of 1908.

WESCHLER: What was that like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I felt I was the best preserved of the whole bunch. [laughter] I sang and played for them and

read to them parts of my manuscript. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Have you maintained friendships with any of them through the years?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. I didn't even remember the names of any of them.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: OK. Well, we've got you grown up and ready to meet Richard, so maybe we should go back and talk a little bit about him.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: I see you have some notes, so why don't you begin with what you have.

DIONE NEUTRA: He was born in Vienna, April 8, 1892, and his mother [Elizabeth] was forty-two years old when he was born. I thought I would like to read to you a few sentences from his autobiography [Life and Shape]. He writes: "My father [Samuel] was a son of a physician, William Neutra, who died of typhoid when serving about the time of the Crimean War." And he lived in Budapest. "Thus my father, to start his working life, was sent by his widowed mother to be an apprentice to a simple craftsman who made cow-bells" [p. 427], which was an unusual thing for a child of an intellectual family. And his mother came from Bisanz, which now belongs to Czechoslovakia (at that time

it was part of the Austrian Empire) and their marriage was arranged by a--I don't know the Jewish name for it: a man who arranges marriages [shadchen]--a matchmaker, and it turned out to be a most wonderful and happy marriage. He writes in his autobiography:

My parents, my sisters, my older brothers, were good to me. I loved them, but that did not blind me or keep me from wondering about the tenement building in which we lived and the rather stale street upon which it stood. Thank heavens all these must somehow have developed my urge for a better human habitat, warmer, also wider, than the four walls. . . . [p. 33]

The manifold life-encompassing feelings and trains of thought which later might help a man to become a compassionate and sensitively understanding architect of happiness are not to be learned in a few university courses. Learning comes much earlier, without talk, and seeps in much deeper. [p. 34]

And about his brothers, he wrote:

My brothers were of course very much older than I; my oldest brother, William Neutra, was sixteen years older, and became a very renowned psychiatrist in Vienna. My second brother, Siegfried, was an engineer and later became a patent attorney, and he was fourteen years older. [private journal]

When I was four, Siegfried would show off my ability to draw correctly a longitudinal section of a locomotive and graphically illustrate my explanation of a steam cylinder's plunger action, a daring mechanism; or he would boast that I could sketch all details of a steam whistle or bicycle transmission. While I drew scores of bicycles and locomotives on the blackboard, the idea of a perpetuum mobile machine suddenly hit me. I was wistful and awed at the consequences my invention would have for mankind. I was not exuberant, but humbly aware that I had a mission. [p. 45]

WESCHLER: Did he ever describe this perpetual-motion machine to you?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: I read that the other day and was wondering what he had discovered.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he never did. [laughter] His mother died when he was sixteen, and he was very, very shook up by that, and he was very lonely after that. Altogether, he was a lonely child, because his siblings were so much older than he was.

WESCHLER: I wanted to ask you, in reading Life and Shape the other day, I was thinking about him being so young. Do you know the American expression "love child"? Do you have a sense that Richard was an accident?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, he was a love child. His parents were a very devoted couple. And I think that he considered that he was a love child. But as I described to you the difference between our upbringing--my upbringing in nature and his upbringing in the city in a very ugly part of the city--it's amazing, with his background, that he would then tend to be so nature connected, probably as a contrast.

WESCHLER: Did he talk of spending much time in his childhood in nature, in terms of the Vienna Woods and so forth? Did he escape from the slums?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. His parents on Sundays always would make an excursion. They would go as far as the streetcar would go, and then they would walk in the Vienna Woods.

It was a very restricted family, I had the feeling, in comparison with mine. I mean, the relations would visit each other, but they did not have an open house like we had, with chamber music where we would invite people, and with opera singers and writers who would come, and so on. And this plagued me later on when I had my own children, because Mr. Neutra would be capable to say the day before Christmas, "Oh, Dione, I could get away for a few days. Do you think-- Can you park the children somewhere?" And I said, "Oh, but Richard, it is Christmas tomorrow." "Oh, let's postpone Christmas." [laughter]

WESCHLER: A very different upbringing.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very different upbringing. When he was eight, he fell in love with Otto Wagner, and he writes in his biography:

In many a life one is conscious of the days of emergent vocational choices only much later than they actually occur. But when I was eight years old, without thinking clearly, I must have decided to become an architect. My unspoken decision was a result of a ride in the new, much-talked-about subway, the stations of which were designed by Otto Wagner. In a very short time I was enamored of him, his buildings, and his fights against strong opposition and public ridicule. He was Hercules, Achilles, Buffalo Bill, all rolled in one: he stood for all the heroes and pathfinders, punished Promethean victims chained to Mount Caucasus or Atlas, or to torture poles in the jungles of backwardness. Here was a missionary and one who was breaking with a worn-out past. [p. 66]

WESCHLER: Did he talk of that subway ride with you occasionally?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, he told me, and he also took me on the subway and later on showed me all of Otto Wagner's buildings.

WESCHLER: Let's talk some more, before we get to him being an architect, about his family life. Did you ever meet either of his parents? His mother had died, but did you meet his father?

DIONE NEUTRA: His mother had died, and his father was dying when I was in Vienna--oh well, we haven't reached yet the part where we meet. But my parents sent me away when they saw that I was deeply in love with Richard, because he was such a poor prospect; see, he had no money and no job. So they sent me to Vienna when I was eighteen. And when his father died, the family cabled that he should come to see him still alive, so he begged my mother whether he could come and see me, and she allowed it then. But I never met his family at that time.

WESCHLER: Can you give a sense, though, not having met them, of what they were like, short of what he's written?

DIONE NEUTRA: Let me see, I think I should read something from his biography. He writes:

I was fortunate to be the youngest child of a happy marriage. My father and mother loved me, but not with a perilous, intense exclusiveness. [p. 42]

One of my brothers was studying mechanical engineering. Sometimes he would sing a miners' song, a chorus of the men who labored in the depths of the pit, ready to die

far underground, where an endless technical pursuit had led them. Always the tears welled up in my eyes when my brother Siegfried sang this song, or even when he only whistled it--and he was a most admirable whistler. I was enthusiastic and sad about the miners. I identified them with all engineers and technical men, who represented to me man himself, with his restless brain of selfless nature-driven propulsion--like those Americans and the one Frenchman who let themselves be shot to the moon. [p. 44]

My brother Siegfried, like my eldest brother, William, played the violin with gusto. They participated regularly in a friendly quartet, and mingled with Arnold Schoenberg and his pupils. [p. 46]

William's influence upon me was entirely different from Siegfried's. A medical student, he often smelled of carbolic acid. He operated a terrifically valuable microscope, and had a large flat black case in which he placed scores of histological and pathological slides, some bloody, some pale, some colored to show up better when magnified. He also had vertebrae and other human bones lying around. I wondered where the rest of the people might be whose stray bones had been taken away from their total assemblage. [p. 46]

When I grew older, my sister's [Josephine] influence emerged. She painted; so I painted too--six years her junior as I was. [p. 50]

Later:

My sister's final suitor entered my world. A wonderful man, he has meant immeasurably much to me ever since I was sixteen. Arpad Weixlgartner was a high court official, an art historian of repute even then, director of the collection of arms and armor at the Imperial Museum, which is second only to that of the Prado. [p. 55]

Later on, he became its director.

After heading the Albertina Graphic Collection, he changed to the famous department of small bronzes, with Benvenuto Cellini's saltcellar and other treasures which I learned to know. He also became custodian of the crown treasury of the former Holy Roman Empire, which is divided into two sections,

secular and spiritual-religious. I had a chance to hold the crown of Charlemagne in my hands and to touch the spear which men of the Middle Ages thought had lacerated Christ on Golgotha. I remember the weight of these objects. [p. 55]

WESCHLER: Let me ask you some questions around a set of issues that come out in his autobiography. First of all, his autobiography hints at a political bias in the family that's generally working consciousness, the miners and so forth. Did he talk much about that with you?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. When he told me about his father--and in my autobiography I have several letters where he describes his father. At that time--he had a small factory where he made cowbells. Richard told me how very often the herdsmen came to him with special specifications. Apparently, the lead cowbell was very important, and it was a very, very delicate mixing of metals to produce the right tone, and they also made gasometers--you know, boxes where you can read what gas you consumed.

WESCHLER: Gas meters.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, gas meters. And on their twenty-fifth anniversary, the sixteen workmen inserted an advertisement in the Arbeiter Zeitung, which was the newspaper for the working class, praising their bosses for how wonderful it was to work for them, how helpful they were to their workers and understanding.

WESCHLER: You mentioned that his father came from an intellectual family. [sound interference]

DIONE NEUTRA: His father was a child when his parents died, so Mr. Neutra knew very little about his grandfather, and his maternal grandmother, he said, was very old at that time--I think ninety years, more than ninety--and he said she was a very colorless person. But she lived with Siegfried for a while and took him to the park when he was a little boy. Then there was a big rift in the family, because one of the brothers, one of her brothers, wanted to take William into his grocery business, and he thought that would be a great chance for him. Well, but William wanted to be a physician, and so there was a big discussion, and the brothers said, "Willy will? Willy wants to? What does he have to say?" So his father threw the brothers out of the house, and they took the grandmother along. And they never visited again. And so William became a physician.

WESCHLER: I gather the intellectual life was very much valued in the family?

DIONE NEUTRA: Very much so. His father went to evening school while he was working during the day, and I think he even learned French, and he learned mathematics and studied philosophy. But I don't think that he ever read a book; he read newspapers. And when his wife died, he was apparently a very lonely man, a very sad and lonely man.

WESCHLER: What of the Jewishness of the family? Was it

in any sense a practicing Jewish family?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. Already his mother and father were emancipated Jews. They were not religious; they didn't go to the synagogue.

WESCHLER: Did they primarily stick with Jews, culturally, though?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think most of their friends, you know, all their relatives were Jews, and as they did not have any intellectual life, I mean, like we had--visitors out of their circle--I think it was a very inbred family.

WESCHLER: Did Richard talk of that much in terms of the Jewish complexion?

DIONE NEUTRA: Ummm, no. No.

WESCHLER: And what of Richard's own sense of religion?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think we really never talked about it. But in many of the letters he speaks of God, and I think he had the same feeling I had, you know, that there must be a force in the universe which we do not understand. And, I mean, that was not a personal god like most religions are.

WESCHLER: So you wouldn't think that in any particular sense his religion was shaped by his Jewish background?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: How about Zionism in the Viennese community at that time? Was he at all active in that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Zionism? Never, never spoke about that.

WESCHLER: What was his attitude about it in later years-- the creation of the state of Israel and so forth--did he have any interest at all?

DIONE NEUTRA: Ummm, no. No.

WESCHLER: So he was very symptomatic of a whole movement of Viennese Jews.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he was, he was. I should perhaps mention that when he entered college, he became befriended with Ernst Freud, who was the son of Sigmund Freud, and he very often visited the family during their summer vacations with the Freud children. And he also made, I think, three trips to Italy with Ernst Freud.

WESCHLER: Did you later meet Ernst Freud?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, we remained friends up to his death. We always visited them. They later lived in London, and his wife [Lux] was one of my most beloved and dearest friends. She was a Greek scholar, and she was a wonderful person.

WESCHLER: Can you describe them, actually? I'd be very interested.

DIONE NEUTRA: If you'd turn it off, I will see whether--
[tape recorder turned off] Well, she came from a very rich Jewish family in Berlin, and through all her connections, Ernst Freud got commissions for houses.

WESCHLER: He was an architect?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was an architect, and so he was very well off. And when Richard moved to Berlin later, in 1920, there was a kind of a strain, because Freud had helped him to get his first job in Berlin. He had wired him to Vienna whether he would come to Berlin. And he visited them, and they were very friendly. But, of course, he was so poor at that time, and he lost then his job, because the commission which was supposed to pay his salary didn't materialize, so he was suddenly again without any work in Berlin during the winter. And so he had a very hard time, and he even became an extra in an operetta in order to make some money.

[laughter] But Mrs. Freud was a Greek scholar, as I mentioned, and had a most wonderful, deep, warm alto voice, and she was a very warm human being, very much in love with her husband. And they had three boys: Gabriel, Michael and Raphael. And Lucian Freud has become a very famous painter in London now. And the youngest son, Clay, I think is in government; he is an-- is it called MP? He learned the restaurant business, and I think he's also a commentator on the radio for culinary delights. [laughter]

WESCHLER: The Freud family of Vienna has gone in many different directions.

DIONE NEUTRA: Many different directions, yes. Yes.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: Anyway, one thing I have been curious about in reading Life and Shape, and maybe you have some insight into this, particularly in comparison with your manuscripts, the sense I get of Richard is a very intense person who was subject to periods of great depression and so forth as part of his creative rhythm. Do you have any sense of the origin of that in his childhood? He describes his childhood as utterly wonderful and lovely and so forth, but do you have a sense of where part of that insecurity or anxiety might have come from?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I really think that it was some chemical which was missing in his makeup.

WESCHLER: Really.

DIONE NEUTRA: Because later on, once a doctor prescribed a sleeping pill, phenobarbitol, and when he took that, his depression vanished and his whole intellectual makeup started to blossom and to bloom. And this was absolutely a lifesaver for him, because later on, when he became famous and people made lecture arrangements with him months ahead of time, he would always be afraid that it might just hit him on a day where he felt depressive, and then he would take that pill the day before, that would even help him on such a bad day; he would then give a passable lecture, which

otherwise he would not have been able to deliver.

WESCHLER: At this point did this doctor-- How old was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was very late in life already. Yes.

WESCHLER: You don't have-- What I'm trying to get at, I guess, and it's probing in a place that--there may be nothing there--is a sense of any kind of anxieties or so forth in his childhood which he doesn't talk about in the book, which might account for some of the depression.

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No. But when you read the letter he wrote when he was twenty-five years old, on his twenty-fifth birthday, where he says, "I am nothing. I have not achieved anything. . . ." So, as he says, that he felt that he was going to be--that he was a missionary. I mean, through all the letters goes this--that he had a feeling that he had a mission that he had to accomplish something. And I think it may have started during the war, after the war, when everything was just shut tight and he couldn't do anything; I mean, every door was locked. He wanted to come to America, and he couldn't, because only in 1923 the peace treaty was signed.

WESCHLER: To your knowledge, did he have any of these depressive episodes in his childhood or adolescence? Was he subject to them?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. He never told me about that.

WESCHLER: So, theoretically, it might even be the war and that whole set of experiences.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it might have been.

WESCHLER: Why don't we move ahead and speak about the war?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he entered the army as a lieutenant and took training in Hungary. He was with a Hungarian artillery regiment and was stationed in Trebinje, which was then, I think, Serbia, which is now part of Yugoslavia. And he was there when the archduke was murdered, so the war started and he never came home again. He stayed there, then, for two years, and I have some beautiful letters in my biography where he describes some of his experiences. But then he contracted malaria and was very ill and moved for two years through about seventeen hospitals, coming from faraway Yugoslavia, always nearer to Vienna. This malaria still plagued him later on; but then, when I knew him, I think it was over.

WESCHLER: What were the symptoms of the malaria?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, the malaria, you know, you sweated terribly and had a very high fever. But he was never in actual combat.

WESCHLER: Behind the lines was bad enough.

DIONE NEUTRA: Behind the lines was bad enough, yes.

WESCHLER: Was he in danger of dying at any stage of his malaria?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, I don't think so. I don't think so.

WESCHLER: In later years, did he talk much about the war, or was that behind him?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No, he didn't talk much about the war. He talked about some of the people he met there and about the meanness of people, you know: to be shut up in a fort for months and with people with whom you are not in agreement, and how the mannerisms of each person started to grate on his nerves, and how his commander was a sadist who was able to play out his sadistic tendencies, while-- He was just a small clerk in Vienna, but then he became his commander, and apparently he felt a great feeling of injustice about things, executions which he commandeered of the native population and so on.

WESCHLER: Do you have any memory of specific stories of that kind?

DIONE NEUTRA: Ummm, no. No. Another one of his commanders was Bandy Ungar, and many, many years later they found each other again. He lives now in Mexico; he's still alive. He had a very large pharmaceutical factory in Hungary, which the Communists took over. And then he became an expert and consultant for many pharmaceutical firms, and he lives in Mexico, and whenever I'm there, I visit him. And sometimes-- He has also an apartment in Zurich, so I visit him there.

WESCHLER: Was Richard in any way changed by the war, politically?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he just saw the injustice of war, and he makes a remark in one of his letters that, you know,

there was no provision--how do you call this here for the veterans?

WESCHLER: The GI Bill?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, the GI Bill. You know, everybody was left to their own devices, and nothing was done for the soldiers and for the officers.

WESCHLER: Well, let's bring him toward Vienna--toward Zurich, excuse me--and maybe you can describe how, stranded in a hospital somewhere between Serbo-Croatia and Vienna, he managed to end up in Zurich.

DIONE NEUTRA: While he was in the war, he met a Czech lieutenant, and Mr. Neutra told him about his wish to come to Switzerland. So he said, "Oh, I have an aunt in Switzerland."

WESCHLER: What was the origin of his wish to come to Switzerland?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he just wanted to get out of Vienna, you know. Vienna was starving, and it was in a very bad shape. So this friend told him that he had an aunt who was running a rest home, guest rest home in Stäfa, which is a small village about an hour's train ride from Zurich. And so he gave him the address, and when the war was over, Mr. Neutra wrote and said that he would like to come there. So he came there, and he describes in his autobiography how it was to come from starving Vienna and arrive in

Buchs, on the Swiss border, and have ham and eggs, and it was just miraculous.

And then he went to Zurich and tried to find some employment, and that was just absolutely impossible. He couldn't. He visited all the architectural offices, and nobody had any work whatsoever. So he finally became an apprentice in a very famous nursery, Otto Froebel's Erben. Gustav Ammann was the chief landscape architect there, and he was very kind to him. He wrote once he was supposed to make a model, and, you know, you make models with nails to have the various elevations of the ground. Well, to his great horror, he noticed that he had hammered so hard that he had hammered the nails into a table which was underneath, so he was very much afraid that he was going to be dismissed. But apparently, Mr. Ammann became very fond of him, and even later on, when he went back to Vienna, when his father died, sent him care packages.

WESCHLER: You mentioned that Otto Froebel's nursery was famous, what do you mean--within Zurich?

DIONE NEUTRA: To nurseries--all over Europe.

WESCHLER: Within Zurich was it well known?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, it was very well known in Zurich.

And then he also studied for a semester with Professor Karl Moser, who was one of the progressive architects of that period and who taught at the Technische Hochschule--ETH, as it was called. And we befriended with Elsa Teleky.

She was from Vienna, and she became very fond of Mr. Neutra; she always called him Herr Ingenieur.

WESCHLER: She was the person who was running the nursing home.

DIONE NEUTRA: She was the aunt of that officer who recommended her. And we were befriended with this Elsa Teleky. and my sister Regula, who was eleven years old at that time, was a frequent guest at the guest home, and when she met Neutra, she was just raving about him and asked my mother to be sure to invite him.

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WESCHLER: We've got you on the verge of meeting each other.

DIONE NEUTRA: Not yet, because he first met my grandfather and his daughter, Ida, because every Sunday my grandfather would have lunch at the rest home.

WESCHLER: What is the origin of that custom in your family? I mean, was it just to have a place to go, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't know how he got there, but that was just a habit, and he was, at that time--I guess he must have been eighty. And he was, of course, from the old school, and Mr. Neutra was interested in modern art, so I'm sure there must have been very many heated discussions among them. Then he met Regula, and then Regula inveigled my mother that she should invite him. And I found in a diary page of his where he describes his meeting, and I quote:

Dione Niedermann, her legs clad in light blue stockings, looking west. I look at her and my impression is blue stocking, a little princess, somewhat stilted. Another impression: oldest daughter of the house, the most important one. A music student, I hear. Complexion not perfect, quite thin, perhaps seventeen or eighteen years of age. Full lips, not very red. Looking straight at you, hair loose held by a ribbon--blue, I think. Her hair covers her ears. I observe her. I see also a younger girl with lots of hair--Doris--a problem child of the family, I hear. I look at Miss Dione but do not speak with her. Later on, in another room, I ask her, "Do you have singing lessons?" "No, I only listen while a lesson is being given to somebody else to learn something. I practice the cello but I would much rather have singing lessons," she sighs.

We shall see. I speak with casual politeness, as a grown up. After all, I'm twenty-seven and she's eighteen.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: What is your version of the meeting?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I remember that when everybody spoke about him--

WESCHLER: I take it he was invited over for lunch or something?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he came in the afternoon. This is the way he looked. [showing picture] And because everybody was in love with him--my sister was raving so much about him--I said, "I'm not going to be that foolish." Nevertheless, I dressed up carefully and had blue stockings and a blue dress. My mother was enchanted with him, because he was so polite. My mother at that time was forty-three years old, in the bloom of her womanhood, and I think he was very much impressed with her. I think in my biography there is a letter where he asks whether he might come once a week and have lunch with them. He did that, and then he brought us most wonderful flowers, which he picked at the nursery. And pretty soon my three sisters and two girlfriends were in love with him. Once we visited him, and we took a walk over the Pfannenstiel, which is a mountain; it's an excursion of about three hours, to walk from Stäfa to Zurich. And we had folk dances together, and we elevated him to be our brother, because we had no brother. And we

made duzen (you know, we have duzis, thou, in the German language). But then I really wanted to find out whom did he like best in the family, so I wrote him a letter, hoping that he would like me best. And this is what he answered:

Dear Dione:

Such mistrust, cry shame. I hate it. Knock my forehead with the back of my left hand. Oh, constancy, constancy to the last coda of the very last phrase, of the very last spring--this is my burning ambition. Those sentences to be read with rushing breath and heaving breast. Girls, I'm all yours. You say it is tiresome that I like you all. I'm devoted to all of you, each one in your family and all together as an ensemble, but I am capable to top it yet. It is your mother I love most of all; you know it already. It is utter nonsense that I should be called a pessimist--don't believe it. Whatever will your parents say when they hear that we say thou to each other? I am so afraid. I think I shall cane my daughter a little when I hear of such goings-on with a stranger on a lonely meadow. My best greetings to my other sisters, and be sure not to forget the smallest. Dear Dione, I will remain to all of you,

your Richard.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: Can you describe him a little bit there. I mean, it is clear that you are all falling in love with him, but what's he like?

DIONE NEUTRA: First, he walked very straight as if he had swallowed a cane, and he still wore his Austrian uniform, without the insignia--just the coat. And then he wore gaiters.

WESCHLER: Was that because he had no other coat?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, because he had no other coat. He also wore short pants. And he had the most beautiful blue eyes and large eyelashes and very black hair, and he was so different than all the other Swiss young men whom we knew. And he kissed our hand when we met, which was of course not our custom. And pretty soon I would tell my mother that I had an errand in town, but instead of that, I would go to the nursery and wait at the gate and then accompany him to the station, because he took a train to Stäfa. Then I persuaded my mother that I was really very tired, that I had worked so hard and had practiced so many hours every day that I really needed a rest. So she allowed me to go for two weeks to this rest home.

WESCHLER: The same one where he was staying?

DIONE NEUTRA: Where he was staying.

WESCHLER: She had no inkling?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, at that time she had no inkling yet.

WESCHLER: She herself was blinded by love.

DIONE NEUTRA: My mother? No! So these two weeks were decisive, because every evening we would take walks together and talk. I had to go to bed at nine o'clock. But my bedroom was above the office where nurse Elsa (she was called Schwester Elsa) and her engineer had a cigarette together after we came back from our walk, and I would sit on the windowsill craning my neck to hear what they were talking to each other about. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Could you, by the way, as long as we're here, just describe the grounds, both at the nursery and at the home, where he lived?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, the nursery was, you know, a regular huge tree nursery, with lots of trees, and they also had vegetables, and because he had so little money, he would eat carrots and tomatoes and string beans and whatever for lunch.

WESCHLER: He would graze in the nursery.

NEUTRA: Graze in the nursery, yes. [laughter] And we were just amazed at how much he ate when he came to visit us; I mean, he ate enough to last him until he came again the week later. [laughter]

WESCHLER: What was the guest house like?

DIONE NEUTRA: It was an old patrician house with three stories, with many bedrooms; I think there were maybe nine bedrooms, so this lady had nine paying guests, mainly old ladies. There was one American from Seattle; Mr. Neutra tried to learn English from her.

WESCHLER: Was it a place where people had been sick?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it was called a rest home. It was really a home, I guess, for elderly ladies who needed some care. Because she [Schwester Elsa] was a nurse, she would take care of them.

WESCHLER: Was Richard there for any reason--because he had been ill?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, just because it was recommended to him. He liked the rural surroundings, and he liked to ride back from Zurich; he could read a book and study or whatever he wanted to do. So this appealed to him.

WESCHLER: Also, in terms of his presence--you described what he looked like, physically--what did he talk about? What kind of conversations did you have? Did he talk about the war, for example, or what?

DIONE NEUTRA: On our walks together, you mean?

WESCHLER: Both that and in the family conversations. What were his interests?

DIONE NEUTRA: In the family conversations? Well, you know, he was a person who would tune in on whatever was of interest to the others and-- [tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER: You were saying that he tuned in to what other people were interested in.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. So, I'm sure that they would discuss literature, they would discuss theater, and I was amazed that he was so much interested in music, because, as I mentioned, his brothers played chamber music, quartet, and he was very touched how his brother Siegfried-- His wife played the piano, and they would play sonatas together. And so he was very much interested in music, and he would turn the pages as my father played. And so he just tuned in to whatever interested the family.

WESCHLER: Did he talk much about architecture, his own aspirations?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. I should perhaps mention that I thought very little, very lowly of architecture, because I think my parents were very dissatisfied with the architect who built their house, and this must have somewhat rubbed off on me. So I thought architects very inferior, [that it] was a very inferior profession. [laughter] But then he talked to me very much on our walks in Stäfa; he told me very much about his hopes and what he was interested in and also about the war and so on.

WESCHLER: Also, before we get to your walks, can we talk about this extraordinary relationship between him and your mother, which is striking when you read the letter he wrote you.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I know that he must have fallen in love with my mother, as he mentioned in that letter, "I love your mother best," and because, after all, I was an unwritten page at that time. And I'm sure I was very pretty and he loved to look at me, but the real conversations went on with my mother. And she, after observing us for awhile, decided that she'd better put some distance between us, because he had no money and he had no real job, and they had quite other plans for me; I'm sure they wanted a rich husband for me.

WESCHLER: What did he talk about with your mother? What was the makeup of that relationship?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, that I don't know.

WESCHLER: What was the chemistry there? [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know, but I'm sure that he was in love with her, and I have later on, in my second book of my biography, a letter in which I write him that I'm really not sure whether he doesn't love my mother more than he loves me. And I found that perfectly understandable, because I thought my mother-- All my life I admired my mother, and I thought that she was the most marvelous person, and I wanted to emulate her and be like her, and so that would not have been at all surprising. He answered in a letter, "Your silly remark about your mother I will ignore."

WESCHLER: How about his relationship with your father?

DIONE NEUTRA: My father-- I think my father-- There was very little relationship also with his children. I learned to know my father when he was seventy-nine years old.

Because he was always severe with us, and, for instance, when we made these concerts, he only criticized us, and only my mother would later on tell us that "father thought that you played that very well." But he would not say it to us. And one of my most painful memories is that every Sunday before we went on our walk, we would play four hands together. We would play Schubert and all the Beethoven

symphonies, my father and I, and he would always say, "I don't care what you play, but you keep time!" And now of course I'm very glad that I had this training, because it was certainly very good for me; but at the time it was most painful and always ended in tears.

WESCHLER: And, similarly, your father kept a stern distance from Richard Neutra also?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think all the conversation was really with my mother, and my father would occasionally tune in, perhaps.

WESCHLER: You mentioned that you had been poor during the war. Was that continuing afterwards, or had he found employment at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he found some kind of employment, off and on, but he always made a dazzling impression when he appeared at an interview; but then after a few months he was not able to deliver, I think. But then it may have also been the times, because, you know, when the inflation started, firms just disappeared and contracted and so on, so it may not all have been his fault; but it was very difficult.

WESCHLER: Picking up a thread from earlier in the conversation about your family's attitudes toward Jewishness, was there any problem with the fact that Richard was Jewish?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, I remember when my mother-- They were

speculating, "Is he a Jew or isn't he a Jew?" So that they asked me, "Find out, find out." So I remember that I asked him once what his religion was, and he said, "Mosaisch."

So that was it; now we knew. But my mother had become very fond of him by that time, so it didn't make any difference.

WESCHLER: Was that a factor in their wanting to separate you then later on?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. I don't think that was a factor. They just felt that, first, I was too young to be already so engaged, and then he had no job and no prospects for a job. So they sent me to Vienna to live in the house of Adolf Scheu.

WESCHLER: Before we get to your being sent off, I had a few more questions there. Had you, by the way, had any other intense male friendships before Richard, or was he the first?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I always was in love with somebody. And my cello teacher, in fact, proposed to me and wanted to marry me.

WESCHLER: Seriously?

DIONE NEUTRA: Seriously. But I told my mother, "But I don't love him," and she said, "Oh, love comes with marriage."

WESCHLER: So she was for the cello teacher.

DIONE NEUTRA: She was for the cello teacher. That was before I met Neutra. I was seventeen then. And I remember

that when he tried to kiss me for the first time, I definitely knew that was not for me, and I broke it off right then and there. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Was there something different about Richard?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: From the very start?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. From the very start.

WESCHLER: When he kissed you the first time, you knew that was for you. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I knew that was for me.

WESCHLER: Was he at all, by the way (talking about his health), was he sickly from the malaria still at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. And he had skin rashes, which bothered him very much and which he tried to cure with all sorts of lotions. And very late in life, his skin would peel inside his hand. And later on, that disappeared completely, but it bothered him quite a bit for many, many years.

WESCHLER: Was that from war-related stuff?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. I think it must have been just a nervous disorder.

WESCHLER: Anyway, we have you two taking walks, at this point, in the woods--well actually, during those two weeks that he is with you. So then what happened?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, then when he came back, my parents started to notice that I was really very much in love with him. So then they decided that they should separate us. And I remember that Mr. Neutra at that time had found a job in an architect's office in Wädenswil, which is a small village opposite Stäfa on the other side of the lake, and he had to go there by boat. On the day I left for Vienna, he spent the night with us, as he often had done before. My train for Vienna left, I think, at seven in the morning, so we got up at five and he came with me on the train. Nothing was spoken of marriage or anything, because how could he?

WESCHLER: How long had you known each other at this point?

DIONE NEUTRA: At this point, we had known each other half a year.

WESCHLER: Things went very quickly.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very quickly, yes. But I was determined that I was going to wait for him, whatever happened. And then he left the train and I went on to Vienna.

WESCHLER: Was it, by the way, very self-consciously announced that you were being sent to Vienna to be separated from him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, nothing was said about that. Yes, and I was sent to Vienna because my parents had been living there for a year while my mother boarded us out--oh, maybe

I should tell that. My mother was always full of plans, and every morning at breakfast we were just all agog what new plans she had, what she had fabricated. If somebody didn't have a wife or didn't have a husband, she would try to find one; or if someone didn't have a job, she would try to find one; or if somebody didn't have an apartment, she would try to find one. And she not only talked about it but she really went about it and did it. And so my father had been in Vienna already several months, and she decided that she wanted to join him, so overnight she disposed of her four daughters: two came to that guest home of Schwester Elsa Teleky. and one went to Basel to a friend, and I was sent to a boarding pension in Geneva in order to take cello lessons and piano lessons and learn French, and I was there for a year--1915, '16.

And so she had decided she was going to join my father, and there they learned to know a family, Adolf Scheu, who lived in a house built by Adolf Loos. It was a very beautiful modern house. My mother had done a lot of canning and had given the canning to this family Scheu, and I was supposed to be in exchange for all these canned goods. [laughter]

WESCHLER: How many cans were you worth?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't know how much.

WESCHLER: Were you studying cello there?

DIONE NEUTRA: I was studying cello, yes, and the husband was a lawyer. They were very much interested in the workers' movement, and Mrs. Scheu was very active in all sorts of political movements at that time.

WESCHLER: Were they Jewish?

DIONE NEUTRA: They were Jewish. And I remember that Mr. Scheu fell in love with me, and when we were at a theater together, he would come near me, put his leg beside me, which embarrassed me greatly. And once he tried to enter my room, and I shut the door, and it was a very disagreeable experience. I remember also that once a young man (I had to take a streetcar to my lesson) looked at me. And one day he approached me and gave me a letter, and in the letter he said that he had fallen in love with me, and he would very much like to meet me, and would I permit his sister to visit me so that he could be introduced. So, of course, I was flattered, and I wrote this whole episode to Richard in Switzerland, and he wrote a very stern letter back, saying that absolutely I should meet this young man so that I could make up my mind. And I was crestfallen; I cried all day, because I was not at all interested in this young man. I was interested in Richard, and, oh, it was quite a crisis. [laughter]

WESCHLER: You were corresponding regularly through this whole thing.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, we corresponded regularly. And I sent the letters to his office, so my parents did not know that we were corresponding, and Schwester Elsa did not know that we were corresponding. So my mother thought that I was completely cured, but then--let me see-- Meanwhile, Mr. Neutra continued to visit my parents and had lunch there once a week, and my mother became fonder and fonder of him.

So one day he invited her to come and visit him during his lunch hour in Maennedorf. She had to take a train to get there, and she brought lunch along. And suddenly he kneeled in front of her and confessed to her how much he loved me, and that he would like her permission--as his father was dying, and he had to go back to Vienna--to visit me. So then, by that time, she could see what kind of a person he was, and she gave her permission, and we spent three wonderful months in Vienna together. He would show me all of Vienna, he would show me all of Otto Wagner's houses, and we would take long excursions in the Vienna Woods, and-- Oh, I should mention, while he was still in Stäfa, this Schwester Elsa invited the two children of his sister to be vacation children. You know, the Austrian government--no, the Swiss government had a special train and invited the Austrian starving children to come and visit Switzerland. So for four weeks these children came

to Stäfa, and they were just there at the time when I was there, too, so we became very befriended with them.

WESCHLER: So you were being checked out on one side, and he was being checked out on the other side.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. So then when I came to Vienna, I visited his sister and his brother-in-law and these children, and I was there regularly. And one day the sister told me, she said that she would like to meet me in Schönbrunn. I lived in Hietzing, which is one section of Vienna, and in order to come to Meidling, where the Weixlgaertner family lived, I had to cross the park of Schönbrunn, which is very beautiful.

I remember once I started very late, and when I came to the other side, the gates were locked. And I had my cello along. So I walked for about a half an hour, I walked along the wall, and finally I found a ladder lying around. So I took the ladder and put it on the wall, and fortunately, the wall was quite wide, so I put my cello on top of it, and then I swung the ladder over on the other side and climbed down with my cello. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Anyway, so you were about to meet the sister--

DIONE NEUTRA: So anyway, I was supposed to meet the sister. And I remember I was swinging along, singing, and I just put a piece of chocolate in my mouth, and somebody tapped me on the shoulder; when I turned back, here was Richard.

WESCHLER: It was a complete surprise to you? [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: So it was a complete surprise and, oh, it was just absolutely wonderful.

So then we had these three months together. And in Vienna, my parents had become befriended with a very rich Jewish family, Duschnitz, Engelmann. Engelmann was the son of Mrs. Duschnitz, and he was a very famous orthopedic doctor, who later was an immigrant here. His son Francis Engelmann is an orthopedic doctor here, and he was eleven years old at that time, and he said he fell in love with me, and I was nineteen then. Of course, he was just a little boy, I didn't pay any attention to him. But I was a frequent guest in that family, and all the big opera stars of the Vienna opera were guests there, and Erich Korngold was a guest there. When Richard was there, we were invited, and Erich Korngold played, and in my biography I have a letter where Richard describes this concert, which impressed him greatly. So that was absolutely wonderful.

WESCHLER: What was Vienna like in those days? That was after the war, so was it a rather dismal period?

DIONE NEUTRA: Dismal. I mean, we lived very economically. Potatoes were plentiful.

WESCHLER: Canned potatoes.

DIONE NEUTRA: No canned potatoes. No, real potatoes,

but the bread was dark brown, it was made with sawdust and was klitschig--what is klitschig? It was kind of wet looking, and on it we put white pig lard, and on top of that we had apple butter. Ooooooh, terrible! Of course, no sugar, only--how do you call that sweetener?-- I was going to say aspirin.

WESCHLER: Saccharin?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, saccharin. But I received regularly care packages, and I divided it between the Weixlgaertner family and the Scheu family. But it was really pretty terrible.

WESCHLER: This must have also been a depressing period for Richard, with his father having just died.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. He fortunately came in time to see him yet, and his father was very happy to see him, and he describes that also in my biography; he describes the meeting with him. But I did not meet his brother, his two brothers and their two wives at that time; I only met the Weixlgaertner family, and we became very befriended with each other.

WESCHLER: How did Richard take the death of his father? You mentioned that the death of his mother was a terribly traumatic thing.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, well, he had not seen his father-- I don't think that he had such a close attachment to his

father as he had to his mother.

WESCHLER: It must have been a very complicated period for him, to both lose the father and to be with you, and so forth.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it was. It was difficult, it was difficult. And it was, of course, very difficult for him, because there are several letters in my second book, which is called Fifty Years on My Toes, because he was so much in love with me and I in love with him, but at that time people didn't live together as they do today. He didn't want to awaken any feelings in me, because he knew he had no idea how long it would be until he could marry me, so he was very distant and careful. And I loved him with all abandon; I couldn't understand why he was so distant and careful.

WESCHLER: That's very interesting. I really enjoy talking to people, it's so different from the situation today.

DIONE NEUTRA: I know. I know.

WESCHLER: Can you maybe describe that in a little more detail, in terms of what it was like, the courtship was like, in those days. What exactly did you do? I mean--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I mean, he even tried not to kiss me; we would hold each other tight.

WESCHLER: This went on for years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, until we married and later on when we were in Berlin together, yes. But we kind of took it humorously, said that's how it was, that's what our parents expected of us, and so we just lived up to it. I don't think it hurt us. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Would you advocate it, or what do you think of today's situation?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, in a way I would advocate it, yes. Yes, I would.

WESCHLER: Why?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because I think this promiscuous living together with various people somehow takes off the whole bloom of this romantic feeling we had for each other. I think it was just wonderful. And we got to know each other so well by writing so many letters to each other instead of just telephoning.

WESCHLER: So anyway, your kisses were as far as anything went--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: --for years?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: It's an amazing thing, because I was thinking about that, reading your letters and so forth, and reading one line after line, and you're still not married, and I'm just thinking, how was this being sustained? It's just a completely different world.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes. It's a completely different world, yes.

WESCHLER: Were there people who weren't as conservative during this period, or was that just-- That was what was expected?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. That was expected. And my husband, you know, he thought so much of my mother that it wouldn't have entered his mind that he would, I mean, he would have a sexual relationship with me. That would not mean that we would [not] lie together, you know, but that's how far it went.

WESCHLER: Did you ever spend nights together? I mean, I'm just trying to get--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we did. For instance, later on I visited him for three months. My parents allowed me to visit him in Berlin when he was in Berlin, and I occasionally visited him in the room which he rented. And once we made an excursion together, and we had two rooms, we rented two rooms, but I spent the night with him-- but that never went any farther than that.

WESCHLER: A very different world. [laughter] Do you have any granddaughters yourself? I'm just curious.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I have one granddaughter through my son Dion's second marriage.

WESCHLER: I'm just wondering what your sense of their growing up is, compared to yours.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I think-- I don't know. I know that my granddaughter [Wendy] now visits a young boy. I'm sure they must have a relationship; nobody talks about it.

WESCHLER: Do you think things in Vienna are-- Is it a different country, or is it different time? Do you think things in Vienna are as changed as in Zurich?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh sure, everything's changed. Everything has changed.

WESCHLER: Well, actually, we have done an awful lot today, maybe we should-- I hate to keep you two waiting another week to get married, but if you waited four years, you can probably wait a week.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes. _ _

WESCHLER: We will take up with the events that led to that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very good.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JULY 10, 1978

WESCHLER: OK, it's been a while since our last conversation. You've been in Europe, and just to recoup where we were, we had ended up talking about your romance, which, we talked about, was an extended one. And I thought we'd just backtrack just slightly before your marriage and talk a little bit about Richard's jobs in Germany during the early twenties, and perhaps beginning with his job at Luckenwalde.

DIONE NEUTRA: I talked about how he got a telegram from his friend Ernst Freud who asked him to come to Berlin, yes, and that he worked in an architect's office. He finally found a job with an architect who was the president of the Bund Deutscher Architekten. He was a very, very nervous man, and there Mr. Neutra met a Mr. Petzold, who told him that the city of Luckenwalde was looking for a landscape architect. Luckenwalde was a small Prussian town. So Mr. Neutra immediately wrote them and sent them some material about his background before they advertised. So he was the first, and they invited him to come, and apparently his portfolio impressed them so much--especially that he was not only an architect but also a landscape architect--that they hired him.

WESCHLER: The landscape architecture was from his days in Zurich?

DIONE NEUTRA: From his days in Zurich, where he learned to make--let me say, how would you say that in English?--make Gartenrabatten, you know, borders of flowers, and where he learned how to put flowers in the spring and in the summer and in the fall so you would have a continuous flora.

WESCHLER: Had that been a lifelong interest of his, or did it develop in Zurich?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that developed in Zurich. That really was a very determinate influence. And Mr. Ammann, who was his superior in Zurich, encouraged him and gave him books to read, and he became very much interested in Karl Foerster, who was at that time the most famous landscape architect in Germany.

WESCHLER: Was it unusual for architects at that time to have background in landscape architecture also?

DIONE NEUTRA: Very unusual, very unusual. So they hired him, and this Professor Straumer, who had employed him, was just horrified that he was going to leave him. There's a very nice letter in my biography where he describes his triumph that he was so much wanted, that he wished to keep him.

So he came to Luckenwalde, and there he had various things to do: he had to design houses, he had to decide on planning matters, but his main job was to design a forest cemetery. And this he did with a great passion. However, he never intended to spend the winter in Luckenwalde, so while he was there, he read an advertisement in the newspaper that Erich Mendelsohn in Berlin was looking for a chief architect in his office. So he decided to apply, and there again, in my biography, are the letters which show how he got this job and what it meant to him to give up this forest cemetery. He said he felt like a murderer giving it up halfway, and all the effort he put in to secure it for twenty years in advance: he proposed a nursery for small plants and trees so that the correct plants would be available later on for the cemetery and so on.

WESCHLER: What happened with the cemetery after he left? Was the project abandoned?

DIONE NEUTRA: I have seen it fifty years later, and there is no trace left of what he envisaged.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: I imagine that's one of the things that landscape architecture-- You don't have much of a heritage, it's just overgrown, literally.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Did Mendelsohn at this time have a high reputation?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, Mendelsohn had the highest reputation in Germany.

WESCHLER: So that, to some extent, there was a certain degree of chutzpah in his going to apply for that job at that stage.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, that's right. That's right. He was especially interested, because he said Mendelsohn belonged to the radical movement, and so he wanted to look into it and experience it. And I brought along the names of the people who were in the office at that time; I thought that might be interesting. He wrote to my mother saying: "By the way, I am among all Gentiles. There is a Mr. [Henry] Kozina, who is a Viennese, and a Mr. Pilzing from Berlin, and Mr. Rembein, also from Berlin, a Mr. Brueggemann, from Frankfurt, and I see already a lot of work that keeps me fastened to an inclined plane called advancement." In German we say schiefe Ebene.

WESCHLER: We can look it up later on.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK--which one calls progress. Then he also--

WESCHLER: The slope.

DIONE NEUTRA: The slope, incline, slope of progress. And he also says that the young Mrs. Mendelsohn works in the office and helps with the correspondence.

WESCHLER: Now, was Mendelsohn Jewish?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: And he employed primarily Gentiles?

DIONE NEUTRA: Apparently.

WESCHLER: What did it mean to receive a letter where it said, "I am primarily working with Gentiles"? What was that?

DIONE NEUTRA: He wrote to my mother, "By the way, in order to reassure you, I work among Gentiles." There are some interesting letters about this Jewish background, and my parents wanting to be sure that the children would be baptized, or something like that.

WESCHLER: Oh, I see. So that this is him assuring them that he's with good people. [laughter] Did you subsequently meet Mendelsohn yourself?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. When my parents allowed me to visit Mr. Neutra during Christmas, he took me along to visit Mendelsohn. And I remember still the room, it was all in grey and very austere with furniture which Mendelsohn had designed himself.

WESCHLER: This is his office or his home?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, his home. His home. And Mrs. [Luise] Mendelsohn was a cellist, and she told me about Hugo Becker, who was then one of the most famous cello teachers in Europe. And I also at that time sang for Mr. Mendelsohn,

who loved especially Bach, and he was absolutely delighted with my interpretation of Bach songs; and whenever we were invited later on, I always had to sing. And Mrs. Mendelsohn told me about this Hugo Becker, and then, three months later, I persuaded my parents to let me come again to Berlin, and I studied for three months with Hugo Becker.

WESCHLER: And this was during this time that he [Neutra] was there also.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Mendelsohn and his wife, perhaps. What were your own impressions of them?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he looked like a businessman, he didn't look at all like an artist. And he had lost one eye through cancer, I think, and he had a glass eye and thick glasses, so one didn't really notice that. And Mrs. Mendelsohn was a very beautiful socialite, a very impressive woman, very soignée, and they always had some interesting people there, but, unfortunately, I don't remember the names.

WESCHLER: What was his manner like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was very cordial, very friendly, and he had an agreeable personality.

WESCHLER: And how was the interaction between him and Neutra over the years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Over the years, it was a very, very difficult relationship, but pretty soon Mendelsohn proposed a half-partnership with Mr. Neutra. He was responsible for the design and execution and supervision of the Mosse [office] which was the headquarters of the Berliner Tageblatt.

And, again, in my biography, I describe this very stormy relationship; this had to do with the building department, because it was an old building. It was a competition. Mendelsohn won it. He proposed to add two stories to develop a completely new corner solution, with a large balcony over the sidewalk. The various building departments rejected it, and only the might of the Berliner Tageblatt finally pushed the whole project through.

WESCHLER: Was that design primarily Neutra's, or was it Mendelsohn's?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that was Mendelsohn's design, but Mr. Neutra made the working plans, and he worked together with a sculptor, [P. P.] Henning, who made the sculptural pieces, which were very large, like the size of a room. And Mr. Neutra wrote in one of the letters that it was not his kind of architecture, that it was an interesting experience for him.

WESCHLER: How did that work with him in his early days? How did he feel about subsuming his own talents and direction to working for another architect?

DIONE NEUTRA: He wrote me that especially when Mendelsohn offered him a half-partnership, that it would be very difficult for him to subdue--no, subdue's not the right word--

WESCHLER: Subsume?

DIONE NEUTRA: yes--his personality and adapt himself to Mendelsohn, and that he would have depressions, and that I would have to encourage him and not tune in on his depressions.

WESCHLER: Now, why was it particularly difficult to work with Mendelsohn? In what way was Mendelsohn difficult?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because he demanded so much of him, and he had to work so many hours overtime. And especially during the time when I was there for three months, of course, after office hours I would have liked to be together with him, and so would he; but then very often he had to work overtime and couldn't.

WESCHLER: Are there parts of his architecture or influences from Mendelsohn that were lasting influences, or what did he learn from Mendelsohn?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think he learned a business behavior, and he learned how to handle big projects, so he felt that that was a great opportunity for him.

WESCHLER: I know that during the building of the Mosse [office] there was a catastrophe at one time. Can you describe what happened there?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes. There was a telephone call one morning that a terrible thing had happened: a contractor had piled some cement sacks in one of the rooms, in one of the floors above, and the floor was cement that had not cured yet. So this whole floor collapsed and went down through seven floors and killed all the people who were working underneath. I think fourteen people were killed.

WESCHLER: Was this in any relationship to the objections that the authorities had had to having the building in the first place?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. That was just a fault of the contractor.

WESCHLER: And how did Neutra react to this?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was very concerned. He immediately went there, but, of course, there was no blame on the architects.

WESCHLER: Did he ever have any other experiences like that?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. And he also acquired jobs for the office while Mendelsohn was in Palestine. There's one letter where I describe how the owner was anxious that Mendelsohn would not change any of the design Mr. Neutra had made; that was a department store in East Germany.

WESCHLER: Was Mendelsohn difficult in terms of preventing Neutra from doing any of his own touches? Did he have a

great sense of propriety over his own ideas that he didn't want Neutra interfering with them?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I think that they worked very well together.

WESCHLER: The difficulty between them was more just that he required so much of him and that it was just so many hours.

Well, let's continue. We've got you in Berlin. How was your relationship going at that point? You don't see much of each other, because he is working so much.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he came home for lunch, and I had a room near the Mendelsohn office, and so we would have lunch together. And that was, of course, very wonderful. But as I mentioned to you, we were supposed to be five feet apart, so that--

WESCHLER: That was the technical-- [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: --that produced some difficulties, but we good-humoredly accepted that this was the rule of the game and lived up to it. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Well, how were you moving toward marriage at this point? Were you getting closer along or what?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, when I was there in the spring, there was no indication whatsoever about marriage. But then, in August, he wrote me a letter where he told me that Mendelsohn had proposed this partnership to him, and that would make

it possible for him to marry me. But my mother wanted very much to keep me until January, because my sister's fiancé from Argentina was coming, and she wanted to have all her children together. So he proposed that he would come for Christmas, we would get married, and then he would go back to Berlin, and I would just come whenever it would please my mother.

WESCHLER: It was a difficult relation. After years of this courtship, you have to still hold it off. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. So he came, and we had a lovely wedding, and I would like just to read one sentence which he wrote me, his last letter before the marriage. He said: "My wife shall above all fortify me and unequivocally let me feel that she knows the good which is in me and in my gifts. Nothing romantic but something eternal." And I wrote him in my last letter before our wedding:

I cannot tell you how inexpressibly glad I am that I learned to know you before our marriage, because I might have lost your love or perhaps your confidence if I had understood you so little. You would have become accustomed to settle difficulties within yourself alone and later on it might have been impossible or very difficult to regain lost confidence, surely the tragedy of many marriages, I believe. My dear Richard, I am quite aware that our marriage can be a wonderful one, that I am a woman who could be envied if she is able to fulfill the task she sees in front of her. But to reach this goal the path is a long one, and the devil may have a chance to set many traps. The most important thing is to be clear about one's path and always to find one's way back to it.

When I read this letter after fifty years, I was just amazed that as a twenty-one-year-old girl, I could see so clearly what my path was going to be.

WESCHLER: How do you account for that?

DIONE NEUTRA: I have no idea. It's just a gift from heaven. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Well, so you were married. Could you describe the ceremony perhaps a little bit?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that was very nice. Mr. Neutra came; he came the night before and he came very late, and I was so happy that I jumped down a winding spiral stairway and missed a tread and sprained my ankle. So the next morning he had to half carry me to the city hall. [laughter] And then when we came back from the city hall, we sat upstairs in my room and read all the telegrams and letters, and then my mother rang the bell and we came down, and there stood my three sisters and my mother, and they had a wreath of flowers--no, what do you call that?--a circle of flowers, and we walked through that bower of flowers.

WESCHLER: Had they done the flowers themselves?

DIONE NEUTRA: They had done the flowers themselves. And my mother had made a beautiful menu with daisies pasted on it, saying what was going to be served on that day. My father gave a wonderful speech, called my mother the sun on which the family revolved, and I was the second sun, [around]

which another family was now going to revolve. And then I sang the cycle of Schumann, Woman's Love and Life, and my father and I played cello together, and so that was very nice. And then Mr. Neutra left and went back to Berlin. [laughter] And I stayed on for another month.

WESCHLER: My goodness. I take it by this time the family was completely reconciled and was enjoying the prospect of the marriage.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, they all loved him. Very much so. So then I came back, and now maybe I should describe how we lived. But first, before we were married, Mr. Neutra wrote me that it was impossible to find an apartment or a house. He was an Austrian, and he was not entitled to anything.

WESCHLER: What kind of housing was he having before you were married?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was living in a room in a housing project, in Eichkamp, in a private room in a small house. And then he suggested that he keep the room he had rented for the winter months, near Mendelsohn's office, because from this housing project he had to walk for half an hour through sludge and rain to his office; so when he had to work very late, he stayed in town, in that room. So he suggested to me that he was going to get a second room, and I could cook in that lady's kitchen. But I was

absolutely devastated. I was so unhappy about that, because all that time before I always had to cater to the various landladies when I visited him. And here I thought I would have my own household, and now I had to cater again to another landlady. Oh, I thought that was just awful.

So he thought of another scheme. He asked the landlady in his housing project whether she would allow him to build out the attic--in addition to his bachelor room. He built a simulated kitchen. It looked like a drainboard but underneath was a bucket, and I had to bring the water up from a spigot in the toilet below, and I had to carry down the pail with water and empty it into the toilet bowl below. And my bathtub was two more flights in the basement, and we, of course, had no refrigerator, so I floated my eggs and butter in the water in the bathtub. And then he bought a Grudeofen. Now, that was an oven that was a contraption. It looked like a stove, like those old-fashioned high stoves, and where you would bake something there was a drawer, and there you put brown coal. Brown coal is a very fine coal, and you would make little heaps and start the fire, and then it would glow, and then you would cook inside the oven. And it produced a lot of ashes, and because we were only subtenants and had no right to bury the ashes in the yard, we had to sneak down at midnight, we would put them in bags, and then we would carry the ashes into the forest and bury them. [laughter]

WESCHLER: So this was hardly the ideal married life that you had been waiting several years for.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I was so happy to have my own household and do my own cooking. I had to walk half an hour with a knapsack to the grocery store in order to buy what I needed.

WESCHLER: This was 1923 in Berlin. Was the inflation going on?

DIONE NEUTRA: It was 1923. Inflation was just starting, just starting. And I remember that one day I wrote my mother, and I said, "I absolutely need a new purse, but it will cost a million--"

WESCHLER: Literally?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, really, "a million, and Richard will be horrified." And then I wrote her later. I suddenly had a revelation: "I'm not only going to buy a purse for a million, but I am going to buy one for two million, because this is really a good purse, and I have realized that it is no sense to save, because in a week it's going to cost three million!"

WESCHLER: I'm always interested in people who survived that period. Was he on a salary that was increasing at the same time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it was a sliding scale. He was protected in a way by that. But, of course, whenever he got

his money, we immediately went and bought something even if we didn't need it, in order to have something tangible.

WESCHLER: I want to talk a little bit about at that stage of your life what your and his plans were in terms of a family, profession, and so forth. Did you envision having his profession be foremost and the family would come along as there was opportunity within the context of this profession? Or, did you want to have a family right away? Or basically, what was your attitude toward that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Our attitude was we would not prevent having a family. But I always thought that he was coming first. And then I became pregnant, and of course we could see that it was impossible to have a child under the present living conditions. So then he redoubled his efforts to get to America. And meanwhile, the United States had made peace with Austria, or signed a peace treaty, so he applied for a visa, and a friend, this friend Mrs. Frances Toplitz, who had helped him already in Vienna (she was working with the Quakers), gave him an affidavit. In the summer we had our first vacation, and that was very wonderful. We went to Uchtenhagen. I tried to find out where that is; I couldn't find it on the map.

WESCHLER: I'm sure it will drive me crazy looking it up, but--

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess it was about two hours' train ride from Berlin. It was a very beautiful place. I should mention perhaps that while we were in Berlin, I occasionally sang for Alice Ehlers, who later came here, and she even wanted to give a concert with me. She was just delighted with my voice. And when we were in Uchtenhagen, we visited her divorced husband, who was a sculptor. I remember that.

WESCHLER: Did you later resume contact with her here, when she was here?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. She visited us once, but [it was] not a very lively contact. And also during the time he was with Mendelsohn, while we were in Uchtenhagen, he received a telegram that Mendelsohn and he had won the first prize for a harbor development in Haifa.

There is another episode where he told me that he was in a telephone booth, and on the other side, a very excited young man was telephoning with his banker, apparently--no, he told his sweetheart, apparently, "The banker told me you must absolutely buy these shares, it's a sure thing." So Mr. Neutra came back and he said, "Imagine what I have done. I have bought these shares." And these shares then tripled and made it possible for him to pay for his trip to come to New York.

WESCHLER: I see, so it was completely a chance occasion.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, because you lived in this atmosphere, you know, of speculation and changing prices. Nothing which meant anything before was valid anymore.

WESCHLER: What was this in which he bought all these shares?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't remember. [laughter]

WESCHLER: It's interesting, both the Haifa project and later his project for a library in Palestine--what was his relationship to the Zionist movement? Was it anything more than just practical, that these were possible projects?

DIONE NEUTRA: Nothing. That's right. Nothing. Nothing. He had nothing to do with the Jewish community.

WESCHLER: Did he have any desire to go to Palestine and to work there?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. So then we decided that we would have to go, that he would go to America and that I would stay with my parents and have the child.

WESCHLER: Now, was that because you didn't have money for both of you to go at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: I didn't want to burden him. I didn't want to burden him, because he had no idea what was going to be. And certainly for me it was much safer to stay with my family.

WESCHLER: Let's talk a little bit about his need and eagerness to go to America. First of all, what was that

based on at all? Why America? Why, if you were an Austrian architect, would you be fascinated by America in 1920?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, two things: first, in 1910 he had seen the first publication of Frank Lloyd Wright, and he was absolutely bowled over and determined that he must meet this man and must see these buildings. And then Adolf Loos, who was his teacher--he attended his evening seminars and met R. M. Schindler there--he was a great enthusiast about America. Mr. Neutra describes that in his autobiography. And so these were two reasons that he wanted to go.

WESCHLER: Was there also an element at this time, in terms of your family life, that it would be impossible to raise a family in Germany during the inflation and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he didn't think about that. But it was, you know, it was just typical of Neutra that he would give up such a good position as he had with Mendelsohn; he might have become his real partner. But Mendelsohn's architecture was never what he believed in: it was too formalistic for him. Frank Lloyd Wright was the architect whom he emulated and wanted to meet.

WESCHLER: In the sense that his was more organic, I guess.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, his architecture was connected with nature, and that appealed to him.

WESCHLER: So he left for the United States.

DIONE NEUTRA: Although he went as an immigrant, he thought it was just going to be a study trip of two years.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: He intended to come back again.

WESCHLER: There was no thought in his mind when he left that he would spend the next fifty years?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No, that developed.

WESCHLER: At what point, actually, just looking ahead, did it begin to be clear that you would want to stay in--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, while we were in Los Angeles--because we liked it so much in Los Angeles, we thought it was so beautiful, and Mr. Neutra could see the possibilities, although there was no tangible evidence of it; you know, we lived there for five years, and he had no job except his one apartment house and the Health House.

WESCHLER: Was it, in addition to the presence of Frank Lloyd Wright, was it also kind of the idea of America that fascinated him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. That fascinated him, and when he was there for-- Well, I think, already when he arrived, he decided that he wanted to write a book and to show that such a vast, vast country without any boundaries, any frontiers or duty boundaries, as you have in Europe, that it was evident, with all the technical know-how, that

architecture would have to develop in this climate. And so he just traced the roots, and his whole first book about America is based on this. I'm very happy that my sister [Regula] is translating it at the moment, and Hennessey & Ingalls is going to publish it. *

WESCHLER: Really. That'll be very exciting. So we have you back in Uchtenhagen and him in New York. Maybe you can give us some summary, just briefly, of what his experiences were in New York.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he had a friend, Henry Menkes, who studied with him in Vienna, had preceded him and lived in New York, and he got him a job in the same office where he worked. And I describe that in my biography, the difficulty first to learn inches, you know, he was accustomed to meters, and this Brooklynese English, which floated around him, but--

WESCHLER: How was his English when he went to America?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, it must have been pretty good, because while he was in Vienna and was working with the Quakers, he translated Kant into English for a professor [Joe Fisher] from Goshen College who wanted to prepare himself for a seminar on Kant. He said it was like chopping wood.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: Generally, did he have a good facility with languages in other areas, too, as he went around the world?

* They have decided not to publish it. [D. N.]

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he learned, while he was in the war, I think he learned Serbian. With his background of eight years of Latin and six years of Greek--

WESCHLER: --he could understand Brooklynese, eventually.
[laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he could understand Brooklynese eventually. And then he decided that he was going to try another office, and he was just amazed when his employer absolutely didn't want to let him go. And he said [it was] only because he was so diligent. But then he left, and he found another job, and this man wanted to pay him less than the rates the other employer was going to give him. And then the employer telephoned this new employer and said that he would like to keep Mr. Neutra, and then this second employer raised him. [laughter]

WESCHLER: During this period, you were getting letters from him, I take it.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, we had a very, very thriving correspondence.

WESCHLER: And those letters survived and are part of the basis for your biography?

DIONE NEUTRA: Part of my biography, yes. Some beautiful descriptions of New York, how he felt about New York. He was very much impressed with New York.

WESCHLER: So how was your pregnancy going and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: My pregnancy was going very well. But then my mother had her four daughters with a midwife, so I also had a midwife, and I never went to a physician, and I never was checked over. And when [the] time came for the delivery, a midwife was not able to bring out a boy who had a very big head, apparently, and it was Sunday, and it was difficult to find a doctor. And when the baby was finally delivered with forceps, he was blue in the face and had a navel cord around his neck and apparently did not get enough oxygen, which we only discovered later because his brain was damaged.

WESCHLER: This was unclear, though, for--

DIONE NEUTRA: That was unclear for two and a half years. He was the most beautiful and gifted of my children.

WESCHLER: What was he named?

DIONE NEUTRA: Frank. We named him after Frank Lloyd Wright. Frank L., Frank Lucian, we named him.

WESCHLER: So for those two and a half years, though, there was no anxiety about him.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no.

WESCHLER: So, all your coming over and so forth, there was no--

DIONE NEUTRA: Then after three months, I tried to get a visa, but the German quota was filled--because I was born in Germany, the quotas went by the country where you were

born. And finally, I got a visa as a musician. But when I went on the boat--

WESCHLER: That's a completely different nationality from German.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes--they told me that "You can't take your child along, he was born in Germany."

WESCHLER: So, you arrived at the boat, and it was at that point that you discovered that you couldn't take the child. What was your-- Were you thinking of not going at that point, or what was your--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, here was my first decision. Here was my first test: would I stick to my husband, or would I stick to my child? So I looked pleadingly at my mother, and she agreed that she would keep the baby. Oh, I should also mention that after about two weeks after the birth, my breast got infected, and I suffered terribly and had to be rushed to the hospital, and I nearly died. And so I couldn't nurse the baby anymore; otherwise, of course, I couldn't have left him. And meanwhile, my mother always thought I would get better, and so she was waiting to write my husband, and he was just frantic in New York, not hearing anything from me for weeks, so that it was a very difficult period for him.

WESCHLER: That's an extraordinary moment, that moment of yours at the ship, trying to decide what-- You say that it was your first decision, in that--

DIONE NEUTRA: I knew immediately what I should do, because, you know, such a little baby, you don't develop a relationship. Although he was five months old, because I was so ill, my parents, my mother, had taken care of him.

So anyway, when I arrived in New York, the officials said, "Well, can you prove that you are a musician?" And I said, "I have my cello along, I'd be glad to play for you." They said, "Oh, no, you have to have some certificate from a conservatory." I said, "Well, my father didn't believe in conservatories, and I had only the best private lessons." Well, that was not enough for them, so they put me into Ellis Island. And the court in Ellis Island sits on Thursday morning and Monday morning, and our boat arrived Thursday afternoon, so I had to wait until Monday morning. We were given supper at five, and at six we were shut into a room with twenty-five other people; and at five o'clock in the morning we were waked up and given breakfast at six-- why, I don't know.

WESCHLER: You had nothing else to do that day?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, but it was a very interesting experience.

WESCHLER: What was Ellis Island like at that time, in terms of the people who were there?

DIONE NEUTRA: Our room opened onto a big balcony, and we looked down into the entrance hall where all the people from the ships arrived. And there were families with three,

four, five, six children, who had been waiting for weeks trying to get clearance, and it was just a whole atmosphere of gloom there: I mean, there was nothing to do, nothing to read, and we just sat there.

WESCHLER: A whole welter of different languages.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was a welter of different languages. I remember what happened to one family. The child which arrived (which you could watch and hear) had been prematurely born in Italy, and as it was born there, while she [the mother] had been living for years in New York with her four children, she was sent back to Italy with that child, and the father was left with four children in New York. And all such things, you know, we observed; it was just very depressing. Then Sunday afternoon we were allowed out into the open, and I had a chance to look at the Statue of Liberty. [laughter]

WESCHLER: For the first time.

DIONE NEUTRA: For the first time. Well, anyway, Monday came. Mr. Neutra was working at that time with Holabird and Roche in Chicago, so the immigration department sent him a wire, and he came then right away; but he was not allowed to write me or phone me or contact me in any way.

WESCHLER: So he was already in New York by Monday?

DIONE NEUTRA: So he was already in New York on Sunday. So Monday he and a friend, this Mrs. Toplitz, came, and

when I saw him, of course, I rushed towards him, and the police said, "Later!" So then they asked me where I had appeared in public and how I intended to earn some money. And then they also questioned my husband to see--to corroborate if I was telling the truth. He then could prove that he earned enough money, so I would not be a burden to the government. And one of the judges whispered to the other judge (our friend Mrs. Toplitz overheard that), he said, "I think she's going to make a good citizen, we should let her in."

WESCHLER: A true prophecy. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: So then I was for three days in New York, and I remember one incident. My friend had given me a beautiful, huge bouquet of flowers, and we were walking through Wall Street, through these canyons, and a group of Negro children were approaching us. I could see that they had never seen a flower. Anyway, they were absolutely so overwhelmed, so I just impulsively gave them the flowers. And then I also had my first milk shake at the drugstore.

WESCHLER: First hamburger? [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't think I had a hamburger. And then after that, on the first of July, we took a night train and traveled to Wisconsin and had our first visit with Frank Lloyd Wright.

WESCHLER: Let's hold you there for a second and move back to when Mr. Neutra was in New York and his decision to go to Chicago, and understand that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: Had he all along wanted to get to Chicago?

DIONE NEUTRA: He always wanted to go to Chicago, but Frank Lloyd Wright was in Japan, and so he became very impatient until he finally heard from Mr. Schindler, with whom he was corresponding, who urged him to stay in New York and learn as much as possible, because, eventually, he wanted to go to California and work with Schindler. So, finally, he heard that Mr. Wright had returned to Chicago. He stayed in New York, because he didn't want to be so far away from me during this period while I was ill; so after everything was settled, and he knew that I was all right again, he left for Chicago. While he was in New York, he met this man--I have forgotten his name now--who wanted him to make a design for a library in Jerusalem.

WESCHLER: Right, I know his name, it was Heinrich Loewe.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Heinrich Loewe. And so he made this design while in New York, and he also waited to go to Chicago, because he wanted to meet this Mr. Loewe once more.

WESCHLER: Did that design ever come to anything?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, nothing became of it.

WESCHLER: So he went to Chicago.

DIONE NEUTRA: Then he went to Chicago and started to look for a job. Finally he landed one with Holabird and Roche, which was a big office, and they were working on the Palmer House hotel. While he was with them, he photographed the whole construction of the Palmer House from the beginning to the end, and that is in Wie Baut Amerika?. And he described for the first time to a European public how such a large American office works, because that was very interesting.

WESCHLER: And that became very influential, obviously, also.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very influential, yes.

WESCHLER: He also, during this time, met [Louis H.] Sullivan.

DIONE NEUTRA: He also visited Sullivan, and I describe that in my biography. He felt very sad. Sullivan was just an old, broken-down man, in a very shabby rooming house, and he was wheezing and apparently very ill. Mr. Neutra took him along in his taxi and deposited him at the Cliff Dwellers Club, where he wanted to go.

WESCHLER: Did he talk to you about his impressions of Sullivan's attitude toward things?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that is in one of my letters in my biography.

WESCHLER: Well, so that on the one hand, he was having his feelings about America confirmed; on the other hand, he was having disappointments and disillusion and so forth.

DIONE NEUTRA: In his autobiography he describes how he arrives in Chicago, and twenty-five years earlier, Loos had told him that Illinois was going to electrify their trains. And now when he came, the train was belching smoke, and Mr. [James J.] Forrestal, the Quaker lawyer who had helped him very much to come to America, told him, "You know, we intend to electrify our trains now," and Mr. Neutra said, "Yes, I've heard that before." [laughter]

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JULY 10, 1978

WESCHLER: OK, we were just talking about Neutra in America, and we're coming toward his meeting with Frank Lloyd Wright.

DIONE NEUTRA: Before we do that, I should mention that when Mr. Forrestal heard that Mr. Neutra was going to stay with Frank Lloyd Wright, he was absolutely horrified. "How can you bring your young bride into this nest of iniquity?" That's what he said.

WESCHLER: I'm going to want to talk to you about the reputation and scandal of Wright at that time.

DIONE NEUTRA: I remember Mr. Neutra showed me the Chicago Tribune, and there were, I think, six color pages of this terrible tragedy which had happened to Wright, where the cook had killed the woman who was his sweetheart and their two children and a draftsman and set the house on fire.

WESCHLER: That had been relatively recently.

DIONE NEUTRA: That had been relatively recently, and the papers just made lurid stories about it, and, of course, all the sympathies of the public were with the first Mrs. Wright and with her six children.

WESCHLER: Portraying Wright as someone who had abandoned her.

DIONE NEUTRA: Abandoned her, that's right. I feel this way about it. I mean, Mrs. Wright was, of course, very busy with her children and had probably completely lost touch with him, and with his development, and in this other woman he found somebody who shared his interest in architecture, and so--

WESCHLER: It is interesting to get your opinion, an architect's wife, of that situation. Well, tell us how Neutra met Wright, and how that developed.

DIONE NEUTRA: He met him at the funeral of [Louis H.] Sullivan, and he said that Wright was very self-conscious and was staying in the background, and he looked like a dandy to him.

WESCHLER: When you say self-conscious, was it about being at Sullivan's funeral or about being in Chicago with the scandalous atmosphere?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it was being together and hearing-- I think Mr. [I. K.] Pond was the name of the architect who gave the funeral oration, the eulogy, and he was an enemy of Sullivan. And so I think that Wright felt uncomfortable about this whole situation, and also he knew how the Chicago architects felt about him. Then he invited Mr. Neutra to dinner, and they had dinner together, and I think they also took a walk together, and then he suggested to him that he come and visit him during Independence Day and then join him in the fall.

WESCHLER: Was this fairly common or unusual for him?
I understand that he had several foreign architects who would come and stay with him and work with him at Taliesin.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it was unusual that he offered him \$150, plus room and board.

WESCHLER: I see. So, in effect, he was really having him come out as staff.

DIONE NEUTRA: As staff, yes. He said that he usually does not do that, but he would like to have him. Apparently, the correspondence about Neutra had been going on for years, because Schindler had told him about him. And there is also a letter of Schindler where he, while Mr. Neutra was in Vienna, asked him whether he would like to go to Japan and join Frank Lloyd Wright in Japan. But nothing came of that. So I think that, through Schindler, Frank Lloyd Wright knew something about Neutra, so he was well introduced.

WESCHLER: So you arrived in New York in June, and then in July you went to Taliesin.

DIONE NEUTRA: After three days in New York, we went to Taliesin, and there is a description of my impressions in my biography, but it was absolutely marvelous. When I think about it, I mean, we were in the same boat as many young people later on who wanted to join my husband, you know, full of adoration, and we were kind of surprised

at how the people who were there for a long time felt. And that was again something which later developed also with my husband's collaborators: all the newcomers were starry-eyed, but those who had been with him for many years, for them it was old hat.

WESCHLER: More sober.

DIONE NEUTRA: More sober, that's right. At that time there was Werner Moser, whose father was a very famous architect in Zurich, Karl Moser. He picked us up from the station in Spring Green and drove us to the house. They had all been preparing for a very important visit of Mr. [S. C.] Johnson, who later on commissioned him to do the Johnson's Wax tower in Racine, Wisconsin. So Wright had built rooms, had added rooms for twenty draftsmen, and everything was still full of paint and smelled full of paint. Sylvia Moser was expecting a child. Then there was Kameki and Nobu Tsuchiura, two young architects from Tokyo, and Bill Smith, a Canadian architect--they were all there.

WESCHLER: What exactly did that consist of? You lived on the grounds, in the same building, or was-- Can you describe what Taliesin was like at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, we were-- Yes, the main building was on top.

WESCHLER: Was that the building that had burned down and was then rebuilt?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And then the other buildings were like a snake going around the hill, down the hill. We had a room which had just been painted the day before and still smelled of paint. We had to walk on a path over the grassy slopes to the dining room, which was in the upper part. Mr. Moser took us around, and we also came into the basement. I was absolutely horrified to see hundreds and hundreds of the 1910 publication [Wasmuth] rotting away there. And we asked Mr. Moser about it. He said that Wright had bought up the whole edition, because he didn't want to be imitated. Wasn't that interesting? I thought, "Oh, if we only could have one of his books!" [laughter]

WESCHLER: Describe Wright a little bit, your impressions of him.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I thought he was just wonderful looking. He was dressed in velvet, and he had a specially designed silk shirt with a large collar, and he was a very harmonious and gracile-looking person--not very tall. He didn't walk but he floated, I would say, and he was most artistic and impressive looking. He was very kind and most cordial, and he showed us all his drawings. We had been warned by Moser that he was very disorderly, that he lost things, and that he would get terribly upset that people had stolen his things and so on. And he was trying to rummage around and everything was lying on the floor.

WESCHLER: This was what he was in fact doing when that happened?

DIONE NEUTRA: It happened, yes. And then we arrived, I think, on Friday, and on Saturday arrived Mr. Johnson, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law. I think that Wright was very happy that I was there to entertain them, because they asked me to sing and play. I don't think I had brought my cello along--or did I have my cello along? Yes, I think I brought my cello along. And they were very enthusiastic about my music, and I remember I felt most uncomfortable, because my English was just practically nil--marginal--and when people asked me, I didn't understand, and I would look at my husband to ask him to help and translate what was happening. [laughter]

WESCHLER: How did that interaction between Johnson and Wright go? What was Johnson like?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was just a businessman, and his wife was just dull-like--no, his daughter was a dull-like creature, I describe her, and the woman was a very nondescript, middle-class American woman. It must have been awfully boring, and I said I felt I thought it was so humiliating that a man like Wright had to kowtow to these rich people and try to win them over.

WESCHLER: How do you think Wright felt about it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I think he felt pretty bad about it.

WESCHLER: During this period, did Wright have many commissions?

DIONE NEUTRA: No commissions whatsoever. We just thought it was a tragedy that such a gifted person had absolutely no work, and that was also the reason that we didn't stay. We only stayed three months, because Mr. Wright just invented work; but everybody had to stay there for nine hours, and he was very upset if people left before the nine hours.

WESCHLER: So what kinds of work was there to do during this period?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, Mr. Neutra worked on an excursion tower for Washington State--an automobile excursion tower. I think that Mr. Neutra did the design; [the design] which appears in Frank Lloyd Wright's publication is really by Mr. Neutra; he designed it. And it also appears in my biography and in the Girsburger book.

WESCHLER: Is the reason that Wright was not getting any commissions the whole scandal, is that basically it? Or was it that his architecture was so different?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think it was the scandal and also that his architecture was-- But, you know, he had built all these prairie houses. I mean, there was no reason why he shouldn't have got commissions. I think it was probably on account of the scandal. And by that time, he had been living for several years with an Italian sculptress. After this tragedy happened to him, I think he went to Italy,

and there he met this sculptress. And again his first wife still didn't want to give him a divorce, so I think he was once imprisoned [by] the Mann Act because he crossed the frontier together with her [the sculptress]. And I remember she would come to La Jolla and-- No, no, that was-- No, that was a different one. Yes. Anyway, while we were at Frank Lloyd Wright's, his present wife, Olgivanna, came to visit. She was still married to a Yugoslav architect. I sang and played the Erlkönig, by Schubert, and she danced in front of the fireplace. It was very nice. We all sat around the fireplace, and she danced, and that was very impressive.

WESCHLER: Was Frank Lloyd Wright a particularly sexual person, or was it just the times in which he lived that made such a big deal out of it? You get a sense, in reading his biography, that there were just countless relationships.

DIONE NEUTRA: No. While we were there, there was a young girl, whom we never saw, and he would bring her. He would pick her up in Madison, and she would come, and he would disappear with her, and then after a few hours, she would be driven back to Madison. And of course, you know, there were all sorts of rumors among the draftsmen, but we never saw her. But I would not say that he was a promiscuous man at all.

WESCHLER: It's just that the times in which he lived were so confining that everything he did looks that way.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And also while we were there (that might be interesting) there came a letter from a Mr. DeFries, who was the editor of the Baugilde? No, the Bauwelt. And he wanted to devote a whole issue to Frank Lloyd Wright. I think that Mr. Neutra translated Mr. Wright's articles, and he prepared the whole issue for Mr. DeFries.

WESCHLER: I see. So that's one of the things he also did in addition to the drafting.

DIONE NEUTRA: And he also helped with the big publication of Wendingen.

WESCHLER: So once again you had European audiences that were fascinated, were interested during a time that American clients were not helping at all.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And there was an American exhibition of American architecture, and this Mr. DeFries wrote that neither Sullivan nor Frank Lloyd Wright will be represented. And so he wanted Mr. Neutra to rush material over so that he could include it in his exhibition. And then Mr. Mendelsohn came on a visit--Erich Mendelsohn.

WESCHLER: I wanted to ask about that. How was that interaction?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, that was very interesting. I remember one evening where we all sat around a fireplace, and there was no other light in the room but just the fireplace. And Mr. Neutra was the translator, and Frank Lloyd Wright was very invective about German modern architecture, and Mr. Mendelsohn was very critical of American architecture. Mr. Neutra translated in a way that he only translated the agreeable things. So they remained good friends, and we--Mr. and Mrs. Moser, you know, who understood German--we just could hardly contain ourselves. And Mr. Neutra, with kind of a diabolical smile--I could still see the whites of his eyes, you know, and the reflection of the flames playing over his face-- He said later on he had a splitting headache, but he was so quick on the trigger, you know, that neither man noticed what was happening.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: On a day-to-day basis, what was it like? He worked nine hours there, and then you gathered together as a community to eat together?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we had breakfast, we all had breakfast together in the farmer's kitchen. Mr. and Mrs. Olson ran the farm, and Mrs. Olson cooked. And there was one incident which is very painful.

On her day off, the women, the architects' wives, had to cook, and I was supposed to make the dessert on

that day. I made Semmelshorn. You take stale bread, white bread, and soak it in milk, and then you add eggs, and then you fry it in butter, and then you cover it with raisins and almonds, and then you put a lot of sugar on top of it. Well, above the oven (which was a wood oven, by the way) there were two containers-- one container with salt and one container with sugar, and it looked exactly the same. [laughter] So I took a whole handful of what I thought was sugar and put it over this thing, and then when I tasted it, I saw it was salt. And then Mrs. Olson came back and forced me to serve it. I would have thrown it away and made something else. So that's a very painful memory. [laughter]

And I remember also the following incident. At noon Mr. Neutra received a little package, and in it was a necktie pin of Sullivan. And a Mr. [Ralph Fletcher] Seymour, who was one of the few friends he had, wrote Mr. Neutra a letter saying that he knew his great admiration for Sullivan, and he had no need of the pin, and he thought that Mr. Neutra would like to have it. And so Mr. Neutra, full of happiness, ran around the table to the head of the table where Frank Lloyd Wright was and showed him the pin, and I think Frank Lloyd Wright was very upset that he didn't get the pin.

WESCHLER: That's interesting. That's especially interesting in the context that Wright and Sullivan had disagreements during their lives.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That's one thing which Mr. Sullivan told Mr. Neutra. He said, "You know, Frank has deserted me, I have not seen him for seven years."

WESCHLER: Well, what's going on with your child during all of this?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. While we were there, Frank Lloyd Wright knew a senator from Wisconsin, and through the influence of this senator, my little boy could enter the United States.

WESCHLER: Do you remember which senator this is?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't remember who it was at that time, but you can find that out. The consul in Germany made it possible for my mother to bring the baby. My mother had gone to Switzerland and had a very rough time, because the lady who ran the rest home where I met Mr. Neutra had asked my mother to help [her] with the cooking at that time. Frank apparently was a very, very lively baby, and so he made my mother's life very difficult, between taking care of him and trying to cook for the people in this boarding house. Anyway, she brought him over, and Mrs. Toplitz picked her up from the boat. She stayed for two days with her. Then she put her on the train, and I went to Chicago and picked up my mother and the baby. We took the train together to Spring Green, and Frank Lloyd Wright invited my mother to stay for a month.

So she stayed for a month with us, which was a great experience.

And, well, suddenly, here I was, completely inexperienced, with a baby on my hands. [laughter] But I enjoyed him very much. We both enjoyed him very much. We would take walks in the evening, we had a little container, we would hold it on both sides, and the baby sat between us and [we] took walks together.

WESCHLER: And again, through this whole period there was no anxiety about him?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not at all. He got his teeth at the right time, he walked when he was one year old, and he was just a beautiful, strapping child. The only thing which we noticed was that he was terrified in the dark bathroom; the bathroom had only electric light, it had no outside light, and he didn't like this darkness, apparently. And I also noticed that when we crumpled paper that he started to cry, that bothered him. And also he didn't like to be thrown up in the air, then he started to scream, to yell. I have a nice photograph with him and Frank Lloyd Wright, on his lap, and Frank Lloyd Wright enjoyed him.

WESCHLER: This child named after himself.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes--as he enjoyed the son of Mrs. Moser.

WESCHLER: Well, I guess we should begin to get you headed toward California, now that your family is gathered. How did that work out?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, Frank Lloyd Wright was very hesitant to let Mr. Neutra go, and he said, "I don't understand why you want to go. Most people are not allowed to stay, but I would like you to stay." And then I tried to explain to him that we hadn't come here to have a comfortable life, that Mr. Neutra had come here to make a study of America, and he would like to go to California. I wrote my mother. I said, "Frank Lloyd Wright makes no attempt to let us go. He piles more and more work on Mr. Neutra which he cannot possibly finish, as if he didn't know that we were going to leave at a certain date."

WESCHLER: He just refused to acknowledge this?

DIONE NEUTRA: Acknowledge it, yes. But finally he did.

WESCHLER: Did you leave partly, in addition, for your own reasons, because you had a sense of Wright's financial situation and that he couldn't afford to continue supporting you, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I have no feeling for that.

WESCHLER: Did that subsequently become a problem with Wright?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it became no problem. No, no, he was very fair. He was very fair.

WESCHLER: I was reading a biography of Wright before I came here, and I know that within a few years he was himself in serious financial straits.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes. At that time, I think, he was still living from his income from the Imperial Hotel.

WESCHLER: I see. This was in Tokyo or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Tokyo, yes.

WESCHLER: I see. During the whole time that you were there, you didn't have that sense that there was a problem?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, we didn't have that sense. So then Mr. Neutra took a compartment in the train, and we would leave the baby for two, three hours alone in the compartment while we sat in the observation tower on the train. It was wonderful. And then we made a stop in the Grand Canyon, and we left the baby for three, four hours alone. I told the maid to occasionally have a look at him or watch that he was fine. We took everything out of reach, and he just had a wonderful time. The only thing we forgot was a Baedeker [guide book], and he tore out just the page on California, when we came back. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Very wise baby.

DIONE NEUTRA: Anyway, we enjoyed the Grand Canyon. R. M. Schindler picked us up from the station, and I remember my surprise to see a Van de Kamp windmill

while we were driving to West Los Angeles. [laughter]
Several of them! And, of course, we were absolutely
overwhelmed with the house on [835] Kings Road.

WESCHLER: Well, I was thinking that perhaps what we
should do is, as we've done a lot of material today,
and maybe we should stop today and start with you in
California next time.

DIONE NEUTRA: Next time, very good.

WESCHLER: We will deposit you on the doorstep of Kings
Road, and we'll pick you up there next time.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very good. OK.

SECOND PART (July 14, 1978)

WESCHLER: The last thing we talked about
the other day was your arriving in town and seeing all
sorts of windmills in Los Angeles, and how that sur-
prised you. So I thought today we could continue with
you describing your arrival and your setting up house-
hold with the Schindlers.

DIONE NEUTRA: I forgot to mention one thing which still
belongs to session two, and that is that Mr. Neutra had
started to work on his book Wie Baut Amerika? while he
was in New York already. And while he was in Chicago,
waiting for my arrival, he made all the drawings for the

first skyscraper and for the terminal with helicopter landing on the roof, which was certainly very advanced at that time.

WESCHLER: In fact, he had helicopter terminals on most of his buildings at that period.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And also I forgot to mention that during lunch he would skip to the museum of art and look at some of the exhibits.

WESCHLER: This is at which?

DIONE NEUTRA: While he was working at Holabird and Roche, in Chicago.

WESCHLER: I see, OK. Well, are there any particular things which he mentioned as important to him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, the impressionists, I think, he was studying at that time.

WESCHLER: I see, OK. Any other particular additions

DIONE NEUTRA: And also he mentioned that while he was in New York he worked on two clubhouses, several one- or two-family homes, two synagogues, one apartment house, and two of the biggest hotels.

WESCHLER: These were projects within the firms that he was working with.

DIONE NEUTRA: And also with Holabird and Roche. And now we are back in Los Angeles and my first impression of the Schindler house. It was raining that day, and so

I have a very wet impression and kind of a dark impression, because the sliding doors were of canvas at that time, and so the interiors were pretty dark when it rained.

WESCHLER: Was this because glass doors had not been invented yet?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, Mr. Schindler used the Japanese idea of the sliding door with wood, very thin wooden frames, but there were glass corners, and then there were small glass pieces above the doors, and the hall was pretty dark. And we were put up in a one-room apartment, which was vacant at that time, and that's where we lived for several months until a larger apartment became available. The rent was pretty high, and I think Schindler was kind of embarrassed, or-- Anyway, he felt it was too expensive for Mr. Neutra. But he wanted to live there, so we moved into the larger apartment. But we had communal housekeeping. Mrs. Schindler would cook one week and I would cook the next week. And we had our meals together.

WESCHLER: Can you describe the house? I mean, it's a famous house, but for people who never lived there, perhaps you can give just an impressionistic sense of what the house looked like.

DIONE NEUTRA: There was a small apartment, and then there were two larger apartments with two rooms, and one was inhabited by Mr. and Mrs. Schindler, and one was inhabited

by us. And it was kind of a corner arrangement, and the sliding doors went into a very lovely patio, on both sides. And there was no kitchen in the second apartment, because Mr. Schindler had thought of a community kitchen. So later on, we then built in our own kitchen into the second apartment, because although both Mr. and Mrs. Schindler were most kind and helpful to us, I started to have a very difficult time with Mrs. Schindler, and I would like to read a letter which I wrote to my mother:

The main reason for my happiness so far has been that I was surrounded by well-wishers and that nobody attacked me, that I lived emotionally without analyzing what was happening to me. This state of affairs continued until I came into the Schindler house. Here I suddenly found human beings with a very different set of values who made fun of me, laughed about matters that were sacred to me. I made the mistake to speak too openly about topics of no concern to outsiders, but the most important thing is that I realize suddenly that apparently I do make mistakes which quite innocently I had not realized before. Every criticism caused me to ponder about it for days on end. I think it is desirable that I reflect more. However, I could have come into contact with a person who could have conveyed her critical remarks in a friendly manner instead of treating any new idea of mine with contempt and being appalled at my "stupidity" and "narrowness" as Pauline does. It took me quite a while to recognize that she herself is an unstable, mixed-up and unhappy human being, unhappy in her relation to Schindler. And dozens of differences surfaced. Perhaps you have enough imagination to understand this when you consider how intertwined we lived. The situation has already much improved, but naturally I have not an unbiased opinion about Pauline anymore, and when I meditate about it and how far I have changed I must admit that I have shed my childlike attitude. Everybody thinks I am thirty. You may ask yourself, why do you continue to live there? There are so many positive reasons, and they are too difficult to explain for

you on the outside. True it is also that I do not want to run away like a coward just in order to avoid an uncomfortable situation. I still hope to completely rise above it.

WESCHLER: With the distance of years, can you kind of put some perspective on what was taking place there?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, the main controversy was about the education of my son Frank, who was then a year old, and her son Mark, who was, I think, two years old. And so whenever she noticed something, she said, "Is that the way you educate your child? Is that the way you feed your child?"

WESCHLER: What kinds of things were different between the two ways you were doing it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I had never read a book on child psychology. I had never read a book on nutrition. And so I'm sure that I made a lot of mistakes, because I simply followed the habit like my mother used to feed us or my mother used to treat me. And it took me quite awhile to see that she herself did not have so much success with her upbringing either.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: Can you describe her, Pauline Schindler, a little bit. Was she more of an intellectual?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, she was very intellectual and very--oh, what'll I say?--she liked to get into an argument, and that made it very difficult. But she was very much interested in Mr. Neutra, and she helped him very much. For instance, she

arranged his first public lecture in America, at the Hollywood Art Association. And in a way, she promoted him, I think, in order to make her husband angry.

WESCHLER: Can you talk about their relationship a little bit? You indicated a little bit in the letter--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, well, of course, in front of us we did not notice it too much, but I thought it was awful how she used him. I mean she would send him on errands, a thing which I never did with my husband; I felt that his time was too valuable, and so I never did that. But I would hear them quarrel, through the doors.

WESCHLER: There was not much privacy in this house.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, there was very little privacy. And the doors were swinging doors so you could not lock them either, which made it very difficult-- For instance, when I practiced, my little boy always wanted to come in and touch the cello, and I couldn't lock the door. [laughter]

WESCHLER: This was a house that was made for an ideal world, but it was not an ideal situation.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, and also I wrote my mother that "I have no place to write you a letter because Schindler doesn't write letters either, and so there is no desk where I could write." But they gave very many parties in order to become acquainted with various people, and I learned a lot how to do that.

WESCHLER: That part you learned.

DIONE NEUTRA: That part I learned very much. And for instance, there was one party-- Did you ever hear the name of John Bovington? John Bovington was a dancer and also a weaver, and he lived together with a Russian girl friend, and they would dance together. And they would dance practically in the nude, which was, of course, at that time for Hollywood quite an event. But it was very beautiful. At night they would illuminate the garden, and for music they had gongs, which were hanging on ropes, and they would hit the gongs. And then I remember one dance where he danced the Ascent of Man; first, man was crawling on all fours and then slowly, slowly he became erect and then walked on his legs, and this he danced. So that was quite thrilling.

WESCHLER: This was at the Schindler house?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was at the Schindler house.

WESCHLER: Was the Schindler house--subsequently, of course, it's a very famous house--was it already architecturally famous at that time? Were people coming to look at it for its architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, they came because they thought it was absolutely crazy. I think that they had no idea of it. But he did get several commissions from that.

WESCHLER: Do you think, in retrospect, that it was a house that could be lived in comfortably?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It could.

WESCHLER: The privacy and so forth was something one got used to?

DIONE NEUTRA: The privacy was something which we were not used to, this open living. And later on, when we moved into the larger apartment, our bedroom was an open sleeping porch outside, which you reached by a little stairway, and, of course, you had to use an umbrella to get up there when it rained and--

WESCHLER: You slept out there even while it was raining?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we slept there even when it was raining. And the roof went about a meter on both sides of the bed, and then, sometimes, when the rain came in the wrong direction, we had to put something over us in order to protect us.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: Is that a style of life you like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, we liked that. Yes. It was completely unaccustomed to us, but we started to like that.

WESCHLER: What was the basis for that? Was that up from any Viennese sources, or was it more an American, Californian innovation?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that was his idea of California living.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Schindler a little bit? We haven't talked at all about him.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I wrote to my mother here: "Schindler is a very difficult character, very noncommunicative, hiding

his true feelings behind a smiling face. He has however such an infectious laugh, especially when Richard tells a joke, that it is a pleasure to watch him, and I like him very much." And he and Mr. Neutra got along splendidly, I mean, they had so much to discuss with each other. But Mr. Neutra tried right from the beginning to see whether there would be any way how they could cooperate together. He first, of course, had to find a job in order to pay for the expensive apartment, so he wrote--

WESCHLER: How much was the apartment?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think seventy dollars at that time. He worked with an English architect, Gordon Kaufmann, for whom he designed, I remember, a Renaissance house on Sixth Street. It's still standing somewhere. And then later on, he changed to a one-architect employment for a man who had got two big commissions, two schools, and Mr. Neutra designed these schools from scratch to finish, supervised them, and designed everything; this man was just a promoter. So he felt that this was a great experience for him. But he had to leave at seven in the morning by streetcar to go downtown, and he came back at six in the evening. And before, he would rise at five in the morning and work for an hour on his book [Wie Baut Amerika?], and then, of course, when he came back in the evening, he would work again on the book, so he had not very much time for me.

WESCHLER: What kind of working space did he have, given that there weren't desks and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, in one of my letters I describe that Schindler helped him to put a desk-- There was a tiny room, tiny glass-enclosed room, between the two large rooms, and that's where he put in the writing desk, and that's where he worked.

WESCHLER: One thing I was curious about [was] just what were the mechanics of how an architect, an immigrant architect arriving in Los Angeles, got a job at all.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, in my biography I describe in letter after letter: how does an immigrant get a job? I mean, we don't know anybody. All the people we knew were also immigrants and so, of course, we didn't get any jobs. But Schindler, through his own house, because he had something to show, had several small commissions.

WESCHLER: He also had been working with Wright on the Barnsdall home.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and Mr. Neutra made in--let me see-- he worked on-- In April 1926, he got his architectural license, and Schindler never got his license as an architect.

WESCHLER: Really.

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: How was he able to work?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, as a designer. So I think that was something which appealed to him, that Mr. Neutra had the license, and he didn't have it. But all through this period my letters in these years--1925, 1926, 1927--are full of unhappiness that Schindler is vacillating, he can't make up his mind; and then finally, in 1926, Mr. Neutra proposed that they could try to get after commercial work. And they formed something which was called--let me see--the Group for Industry and Commerce. That time, in 1926, he met at a private party a promoter for whom he started to design apartments, and only one of them was then finally built.

WESCHLER: Before we move from Schindler and Neutra, what was the basis of Schindler's vacillations? It seemed like something that was just inevitable--they were coming together, old friends and so forth--what seemed to be the problem?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think that he was such an individualist that they were really quite far apart. I always try to describe it this way: Mr. Neutra always believed that prefabrication would eventually have to be the road for the architects in order to house the millions of people, and so all his designs could be prefabricated. But Schindler was very much interested in space exploration, so all his houses were-- Each house was again completely

different, and designed for a particular space. And so I guess that he felt that they were probably not suited to each other.

WESCHLER: Were there any personality conflicts as well?

DIONE NEUTRA: No personality conflicts.

WESCHLER: It was entirely theoretical and practical.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. Yes. Then in August of 1926 arrived the competition drawings for the League of Nations. That was something my mother wanted very much, that Mr. Neutra would win the first prize and then we would come back to Europe. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Was that a possibility in your own mind in those days, that you would go back to Europe at some point?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Mr. Neutra really only had a two-year study trip in mind, so in the beginning he didn't think that we would stay. When the competition material arrived, Mr. Neutra realized that they had to fill out eighteen two-meter-long and one-and-a-half-meter-wide boards in ink, a work of at least four months. So Mr. Neutra gave up his job and worked seventeen hours a day. He tried to entice Schindler to work with him. I have letters in my biography where we are desperate, because he doesn't come. Schindler worked mostly at night, and the parties went up to sometimes two o'clock at night, and as Mr. Neutra had to go downtown to work in the office, it was difficult for him

to stay up that late. Well, finally Schindler agreed that he would work on it, and then the drawings were dispatched, but they did not win the first prize. They did not win any prize. But we found out that Le Corbusier won the first prize, and Hannes Mayer and the work of Schindler and Neutra were chosen for a circulating exhibit in Europe. And my husband found, to his horror, that my parents labeled the project "Neutra's project." We sent them a telegram and we sent them letters to insist that it be named "Schindler-Neutra." And my husband said, "How can I stand in front of Schindler if you do this to me?" And this is one of the controversies here, that Neutra suppressed Schindler's name, but it was my parents who did that.

WESCHLER: What were the relative contributions of Neutra and Schindler on that project, now looking back at it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Now looking back, I think that two-thirds were Mr. Neutra's work and one-third was Schindler's work, and I think that Schindler's change of the exterior was the reason that it didn't win a prize.

WESCHLER: What kind of exterior had Neutra had as opposed to what Schindler--

DIONE NEUTRA: Schindler introduced very large protruding balconies for the visitors to overlook the arrival of the delegates by airplane.

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WESCHLER: You had just mentioned--let's make sure that we got it on the tape--about the balconies being a problem in Schindler's contribution to the League of Nations design.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, my parents got in touch with Werner Moser, you know, whom we met at Frank Lloyd Wright's office, and his father, Karl Moser, was one of the judges, and so we got a lowdown of what happened during the judging. I'm describing that in my biography. And he told us that this project nearly got a prize, but the judges didn't understand the protruding balconies.

WESCHLER: Did this create any tension between Neutra and Schindler?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't think so.

WESCHLER: Did the fact that the Neutra designation was put on the map without "Neutra-Schindler," did that create tension between them?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, this we didn't know at that time. We didn't know that it would produce this feeling of anger in Schindler, because my husband had to explain to him that my parents were so convinced, you know, from my long letters that Schindler had not much to do with it, that it was only a courtesy on Mr. Neutra's part that he had mentioned him. But, of course, that was not correct.

WESCHLER: Did that in turn create tension between you and Schindler?

DIONE NEUTRA: Not at that time. At least I don't remember that. Don't remember that.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And then in 1926, Mr. Neutra sent off his manuscript Wie Baut Amerika?. At first his brother-in-law in Vienna was supposed to help him to find a publisher, but that didn't work out. Then my parents went into action; and lo and behold, in October they sent him a wire that they had found a publisher, which made us very happy.

WESCHLER: Can you describe a little bit about the writing of that book? I mean, one of the things that's really astonishing in that book is the intensity of the study that has gone into it about American technological know-how.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: In practical terms, how did Neutra learn those things? What did he do on a day-to-day basis to learn those things?

DIONE NEUTRA: At first, by working in various offices; whenever he got a raise he moved to another office, because then he felt that he had learned enough. And then he studied all the literature, all the magazines, and especially Sweets Catalogue interested him very much, because there he could see the technical development of the building industry. At that time I think it was only one volume.

WESCHLER: So, in a way, at these offices he was doing considerably more research than a working architect needed to do.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, that was the main reason that he went there, and he would talk with the various draftsmen; you know, he would try to find out. This is, anyway, typical of him that he learned most by talking to interesting people. Whenever there was a person, whether he be a shoemaker or he would run a market or whatever it was, when he had the feeling that this man was an expert in his field, he would corner him, and he would press him dry like a lemon, and he would try to learn anything and everything he could. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Did he also supervise the actual building of some of the buildings that he designed, so he was on the site a good deal and talking to contractors?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. But, for instance, in the building of the Palmer House in Chicago, you know, he photographed the whole construction and watched everything. When, for instance, he applied for a job at Holabird and Roche, he did not mention to them that he was a designer, because he wanted to work in the technical division. So he detailed toilet groups and elevator shafts and such things.

WESCHLER: Before we go on with the chronological sweep, can you just give a sense of what Los Angeles looked like

in 1926 when you arrived? You mentioned the Van de Kamp's windmills and so forth, but I take it, for starters, that it wasn't quite as populated as it is today.

DIONE NEUTRA: It certainly wasn't. As I remember, La Brea was a dirt road, and Wilshire Boulevard, from La Brea out, was a dirt road. When I learned to drive in 1926, I would practice driving from Kings Road to the Carthay Circle Theatre over the bean fields. Carthay Circle Theatre was on Wilshire, near Olympic.

WESCHLER: Kings Road itself was virtually on the edge of the city at that time.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right, and there were very few houses there.

WESCHLER: Bean fields all around?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And then we would walk into the hills, there would be paved roads up in the hills, and then they suddenly would stop. There would be developments on the sides of these paved hills, and we would walk up in the hills, and there was nothing.

WESCHLER: Was there a good deal of construction going on at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. There was lots of construction going on.

WESCHLER: That surprises me only at the level of how difficult Neutra--how difficult a time Neutra had, Neutra and Schindler both had, in terms of getting jobs.

DIONE NEUTRA: Because they didn't know any rich people, you know. I mean this depression--how do you meet rich people?

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. And so all they had were the parties.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: Can you describe them a little bit, also, more in detail? Who were some of your friends in that early period? Who were the friends that you had here in Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: In that early period? There was Conrad and Mary Buff. He was a Swiss painter who has many of his paintings in the museums here, and they later collaborated: she wrote children's books and he would illustrate them, so they became quite famous in their own right later on. And then there were--

WESCHLER: Was Barbara Morgan a friend at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, Barbara Morgan was a friend at that time, and Willard D. Morgan later on; that comes when the Lovell house comes.

WESCHLER: I see, so not at that early time.

DIONE NEUTRA: And--I'm trying to think of their name--

WESCHLER: Why don't you describe them, and we can put in their name later on. Why don't you describe her, and we can come back with her name.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, she was a very fat lady; she was a friend of Schindler's and was a really wonderful, motherly person. And we saw quite a bit of them. [Mr. and Mrs. Karl Howenstein. They later divorced, and she took her maiden name, Edith Gutterson.] Then later on, in 1926, we also met J. R. Davidson and Greta Davidson. Mrs. Davidson just died last week, to my regret.

WESCHLER: Can you describe them.

DIONE NEUTRA: He came from Berlin, and she was a very vivacious person, and he was doing commercial jobs. It then later on became a little bit difficult when he started to design residences because--but that came then later on in the thirties, because then, of course, he became a rival, and we moved through the same circles, so that created some difficulties.

WESCHLER: Personal tensions.

DIONE NEUTRA: Personal tensions, yes. And then there was Alexander Brandner, he was a friend. And then--I've also forgotten his name--Schindler built an apartment house for him near Griffith Park.

WESCHLER: We can find the names.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I don't remember--

WESCHLER: Were these generally friends who were Schindler's friends who became Neutra's friends?

DIONE NEUTRA: These were Schindler's friends, and then they became our friends, too.

WESCHLER: Were they primarily émigrés themselves?

DIONE NEUTRA: They were-- No-- Yes, the Buffs were immigrants--and I can't remember--

WESCHLER: For example, was German the primary language spoken at the Kings Road house?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, no, in English, because Mrs. Schindler didn't understand German.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And we made up our mind that we wanted to become--at that time, already, we wanted to become Americans, and so we tried to, as soon as we could speak well enough English, we spoke English together.

WESCHLER: To each other?

DIONE NEUTRA: To each other.

WESCHLER: That continued all your life?

DIONE NEUTRA: All our lives.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: That's interesting. In terms of these parties that took place at night, were they primarily artist types, or were there, for instance, were contractors and--

DIONE NEUTRA: Not contractors, but I remember there were lawyers, but, of course, I don't remember any names.

WESCHLER: I'm not so much interested in particular names as general moods and feelings.

DIONE NEUTRA: No. Yes. I think also movie people were there, teachers--

WESCHLER: What were your relations with the movie group? Did you have friends who were directors?

DIONE NEUTRA: None. We had no relations with movie people at all, because we wanted to meet Americans; so we tried to keep away from the German crowd and from the Swiss crowd.

WESCHLER: Those were the primary people in the movie community?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: And was this a kind of a thought-out thing, that you did not want to associate with the movie people?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Emigrés?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: OK. Well, two other questions in terms of Los Angeles architecture at that time.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Did you have any contact or experience of Greene and Greene on the one hand or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't think we knew anything about Greene and Greene at that time. They became famous much later.

WESCHLER: And when did Neutra have his first contact with them in terms of their buildings and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, maybe 1950--

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: --sixty.

WESCHLER: How about Irving Gill?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Irving Gill, of course, he sought him out, and Neutra was the first architect who publicized Gill. Gill was, of course, completely unknown at that time. In his second book, 1929, New Building in the World: Amerika, he is bringing quite a bit about Gill's work.

WESCHLER: What was Gill's situation here in Los Angeles at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: He had apparently had a big fire, and everything burned. There's a letter in my biography where he tells Mr. Neutra he cannot give him any plans, and I think Mr. Neutra drew up the plans himself, which he published in his book.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was Gill?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember. I don't think I ever met him.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Mr. Neutra met him.

WESCHLER: And did Neutra have many meetings with him, or was it just a casual acquaintance?

DIONE NEUTRA: Just-- I don't think-- Maybe five or six meetings.

WESCHLER: Do you think that Gill was influential on Neutra's own work?

DIONE NEUTRA: Architecture? No. I don't think so. I don't think so.

WESCHLER: OK. Well, why don't continue with more or less the chronology of what you have in your lap.

DIONE NEUTRA: October 8, 1926, my son Dion was born. And I remember that on November 4, we left him alone for the first time and went to hear Al Jolson and the Vitaphone. That was the first time that the Vitaphone movies were shown. And I remember Mr. Neutra writes in his biography that he sees what a revolution that will produce in the movie field and how famous singers from Europe would come and perform in the Vitaphone.

WESCHLER: How old was Frank at the time that Dion was born?

DIONE NEUTRA: Two and a half.

WESCHLER: By this time were you beginning to realize that there were complications with him or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we began to realize that the people used to say, "Why don't you do something, something is wrong with this child, because he doesn't talk." But he was a most beautiful and happy little boy. He had

such a sunny disposition, but we noticed that he didn't pay any attention to other children, so I guess one would call him an autistic child today.

WESCHLER: How did you--

DIONE NEUTRA: And then we finally took him to the child guidance clinic.

WESCHLER: How old was he at this point?

DIONE NEUTRA: Then he was three. And they suggested that we put him into an American family, because at that time we still spoke German to each other, and that he should be together with other children and should only hear American language. So then we found a family in Arcadia who took him in.

WESCHLER: So it was a foster home.

DIONE NEUTRA: That was a foster home, yes. That was very sad.

WESCHLER: And how did that play out?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he was still with us when Dion was born, and I would go there once a week and visit him. But he was such an artistic child, and this environment was very unartistic, so when I look at the photographs he looked very unhappy, very strained when he was there.

WESCHLER: Let's talk a little about his future. What happened with him in the years thereafter?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, that will come when we go to Europe. I will tell--

WESCHLER: OK.

DIONE NEUTRA: --about that. And then in 1927 Mr. Neutra met Dr. [Philip M.] Lovell. Schindler had built, you know, this famous house at the beach for him, and he had also built a house in the mountains and the house near San Diego, Fallbrook. And apparently, Lovell was very dissatisfied with Schindler, and Schindler was tired of Lovell.

WESCHLER: On what grounds?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because the house in the mountains was built of Celotex, and the Celotex swelled during the winter rains, and the roof collapsed. And the house in Fallbrook burned down; that wasn't, of course, Schindler's fault. But the porches in the house at the beach were filled with water. But Schindler had a habit of having the wives of his clients fall in love with him. I remember, for instance, that some of them would telephone, and I had strict instructions when answering the phone when he wasn't in, that I would always say that Mr. Schindler is not in. And he would simply not return the call.

WESCHLER: How did this work out? Did he encourage this to happen, or did it just seem to happen?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think that he was a very erotic personality, and women would, I think, would just fall for him. He looked--like a hippie at that time. While other people had, you know, regular collars, he had always an open shirt,

and he had very wavy hair and a big head, and he had this smile and a very winning personality. And so Mrs. Lovell was really in love with him, and so I think that Dr. Lovell was not very happy about that. Also he thought that Schindler and Neutra were associates, and so he would rather deal with Mr. Neutra instead of with Schindler. And Mr. Neutra tried very hard to convince him that they should do this townhouse together, but Schindler absolutely didn't want to. Then--

WESCHLER: It was Schindler's decision not to do it with Neutra, together?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. He didn't want to work with Lovell anymore.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And he told in a letter he wrote me while I was in Ojai on a vacation with Galka Scheyer that he has finally persuaded Lovell to accept Schindler's collaboration, but Lovell wanted him to be responsible for everything. But then Schindler didn't want the work. He said to Neutra, "If you don't do this work, if you don't take the job, then Lovell will give it to somebody else. So why don't you take it?" And I think he never at that time realized that this would become such a famous house.

WESCHLER: Well, can you talk a little bit about this man Lovell who had two of the most famous houses in the world

built for him.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Well, he was a--how shall I describe him?--he was kind of a he-man, kind of rough, and very much in contrast with his wife Leah, who was a teacher and very refined. It was a very unhappy marriage, and they quarreled terribly with each other. They had three lovely boys, but it was kind of painful to be together with them, because you could feel the tension in the air. And I think that the house Mr. Neutra designed for them really kept them together, because they both loved the house very much.

WESCHLER: They both married the house separately and decided to stay together. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: What exactly was the basis of Lovell's fortune? Was he a rich man, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, no, he wrote a column for the Los Angeles Times, "Care of the Body," and through that, he got so many patients that he opened a clinic, and Mr. Neutra designed his clinic for him. And so he had twenty-five assistant doctors, so I think that's where he made his money.

WESCHLER: Was he kind of the clichéd image of a California health nut, or was he--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he was. He was a nature doctor. He

was not an M.D.

WESCHLER: And how did Neutra feel about his health theories?

DIONE NEUTRA: We were very much influenced by that. I think we stopped drinking coffee, and we ate many more vegetables, and we had many more salads, and we ate many more fruits.

WESCHLER: What in his personality allowed him to go along with this very visionary architecture that he eventually commissioned these designs?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I have an interesting letter in my biography where I describe--he just felt that both Schindler and Neutra were architects who could see the possibilities of California climate. And he was especially interested in Mr. Neutra's ideas, because he believed in human biology, I mean, he had read so much about it. So this appealed to him that they would build a health house, they would build a house to show how healthy one can live in such a house.

WESCHLER: Now, in the actual designing stages of the house, was it kind of a collaboration between them that they--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: --that they would get together and talk about what was needed and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, very much so. For instance, he wanted

to have open sleeping porches so you could sleep outside, and he wanted to have glass where ultraviolet rays could get in, and the bathroom was a very unusual bathroom, with all kinds of physical therapist showers, shower heads and so on. And then, of course, he wanted to have a pool without chlorination. This was during the design period. And then in 1928, the Jardinette Apartments were completed.

WESCHLER: Let's talk a little about that. There was some kind of difficulty with the man who had commissioned them? Or what was with that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes. The man [a Mr. Miller] suddenly disappeared, and we tried to go to his house, and they had shut off his water, and they shut off his telephone, and he just disappeared.

WESCHLER: Who was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was just a promoter. And he tried to get together the financing of a very large housing project, apartment projects, and Mr. Neutra had to give him part of his fee, architect's fee, and I wrote to my mother that, even so, we are lucky to have it.

WESCHLER: So after he had disappeared--this was confusing to me when I was reading the letters--after he had fled, do you think he was a criminal, or do you think he just got into a tight spot?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he just got into a tight spot: how to

pay.

WESCHLER: So he fled, but the Jardinette Apartments continued to be built?

DIONE NEUTRA: Continued to be built.

WESCHLER: On what money? How did that work out?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think there was a contractor who took that over then, because I think the buildings were already under construction when this happened, when he disappeared.

WESCHLER: I see. I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: So there was some finance company who completed it.

WESCHLER: One question I had with regard to both the Jardinette Apartments and also the Health House is that these looked wonderful on paper, they had very innovative ideas and so forth, but precisely for that reason they might have been very difficult to contract in terms of people not being terribly eager to use new ideas. How did Neutra deal with contractors to get them to agree?

DIONE NEUTRA: He enthused them and he educated them. And for instance, during the construction, or before he started to construct the Lovell house, I think he interviewed seventy-two individual contractors, seven to eight hours a day. And then he found out that he couldn't find a general contractor, because the prices would have become much too high, so he became the general contractor.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was on the premises every day. And he coordinated everything. And do you know that when the house was opened, Dr. Lovell displayed a letter of commendation saying how much he appreciated what Mr. Neutra had done. But I think Mr. Neutra had a personality which was able to enthuse other people. And so he built that house with enthusiasm. [laughter]

WESCHLER: And also a practical knowledge that was able to just keep things under control.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That's right. This was really, if you think of it, a daring attempt on his part. He decided on a steel construction, because the property is a very steep hillside, and Lovell wanted to have a swimming pool.

WESCHLER: Was that property, by the way, chosen before they started working together?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, before they started working together.

WESCHLER: That was a given?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was a given, yes, a given thing. And that was a very, very difficult thing, and Mr. Neutra's steel plans were to an eighth of an inch exact. After all, this was only his second job, because-- No, I mean, he worked on the Mosse [office] in Berlin, but in America this was the first real big job which he had to work on.

WESCHLER: And he started with a bang. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: And he started with a bang, yes.

WESCHLER: Was it unusual at that time to have houses that large and so forth in the hills like that?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think it was the first domestic steel construction in the United States--

WESCHLER: Really.

DIONE NEUTRA: --because I think steel was used for commercial buildings only.

WESCHLER: What was the neighborhood like in terms of what other kinds of houses were in there?

DIONE NEUTRA: There were very few houses around there. And of course, you know, everything was Spanish. And when it was completed, Dr. Lovell wrote an article in the Los Angeles Times for his daily column, "Care of the Body," and invited the public to visit. So 5,000 people, on two subsequent weekends, toured the house. And not one commission resulted from that, because it was so far advanced of its time.

WESCHLER: Was it controversial, did people ridicule it and so forth, or was it just not accepted?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, they just looked at it like it was something on the moon, you know.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: They just didn't understand it.

WESCHLER: How long did it take to build?

DIONE NEUTRA: One year. Mr. Neutra started the drawings in August '28, and it was completed in December 1929.

WESCHLER: Do you have any idea how much it cost (just ball-park figures)?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think \$35,000. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Them were the days.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, them were the days. And also in 1929, he started to teach at the Academy of Modern Art.

WESCHLER: Can you tell us what that is? I've come upon it in references and so forth, and I have no idea what that was.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I have no idea how it came about.

Mr. Ferenz, I think, was a Hungarian, and he started this academy, but how he chose Mr. Neutra I really don't know.

WESCHLER: Well, can you first of all describe who he was, just personalitywise, what he was like, and secondly what his academy was exactly.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, the academy was-- I think they taught drawing there, and painting and sculpture and architecture.

WESCHLER: What did "modern art" mean in those terms?

DIONE NEUTRA: Modern art: well, I think all the paintings and whatever sculptures were modern at that time.

WESCHLER: It was contemporary European--

DIONE NEUTRA: Contemporary--

WESCHLER: --trends? I mean, it wasn't just--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes.

WESCHLER: And how did he get his background, Ferenz?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember.

WESCHLER: Do you remember what he was like?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was a very pleasant-looking man, who gave Mr. Neutra a lot of freedom. And his first students were Gregory Ain and Harwell [Hamilton] Harris, and he worked with them on his city-planning projects which he had started and describes in Wie Baut Amerika? and continued then under the title "Rush City Reformed." And he worked with his students on the freeway and on housing schemes.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Now, this was an actual building somewhere in town that this institute was at?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I don't remember where it was.

WESCHLER: They would go and meet there. How long did this institute survive?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know either. I don't think it survived when we came back in 1931. There is no mention that-- Mr. Neutra didn't go back there, he went to another school.

WESCHLER: Was it just a flash in the pan? Or did it have a lasting effect, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess it was just a flash in the pan.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Can you describe Gregory Ain and Harwell Harris?

DIONE NEUTRA: Gregory Ain? Well, he was a very enthusiastic student, young man, of course, at that time. I remember then both he and Harwell Harris, you know, then later joined Mr. Neutra and worked in his office, later on. But I can't describe him; I really don't remember that.

WESCHLER: Did he bring the students back to the house much, or was it really just the kind of thing where he was teaching?

DIONE NEUTRA: At that time I think it was mainly in the school.

WESCHLER: Did they help him with the Health House also in terms of plans and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think they must have. I think they must have.

WESCHLER: One question I always wanted to ask about "Rush City" was where it got its name.

DIONE NEUTRA: "Rush City?" Well, I think it got its name because everything is rush, rush, rush in America.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: So that's that! [laughter]

WESCHLER: Is that specifically a celebration of that aspect, or is it a kind of irony to call it "Rush City"? Today when we say things are rush, rush, rush, we're saying, oh, it's horrible, it's terrible, things are-- Was it praise?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think Mr. Neutra tried to counteract that and build a city where there wouldn't be that rush. I think that was his interest.

WESCHLER: I see. One person that you mentioned very quickly in passing was Galka Scheyer, and she certainly was a member of your community. Can you talk a little about her?

DIONE NEUTRA: Galka Scheyer and--oh, I don't remember their names--famous sculptor, German sculptor at that time--

WESCHLER: Lehmbruck?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he came here-- His wife came together with Galka Scheyer. Perhaps the name will come to me.

[Archipenko]

WESCHLER: Oh, I know who you mean, too. I can't remember. OK, go ahead.

DIONE NEUTRA: I remember they visited us while we were at Kings Road. And Galka Scheyer had a very big nose, I remember, was a very ugly woman, but she was the one really who persuaded Mr. Neutra to stop his hesitancy, to accept this Lovell job; she thought it was ridiculous and that he should take it. And I think that she became Schindler's girl friend: Galka Scheyer.

WESCHLER: Really? Can you talk a little bit more about her? What was her background, and what was her presence here?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, she was a painter and she was a collector of the Blue Four. And you know that later on Mr. Neutra did the house for her.

WESCHLER: What was she doing here in Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think that she was trying to promote the Blue Four. Later she gave drawing lessons for children.

WESCHLER: In Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: In Los Angeles, and she, of course, had a very difficult time. We would have bought a painting at that time, but we had no money either. [laughter]

WESCHLER: But what was she doing on a day-to-day basis? Was she trying to deal, be a dealer for them?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know.

WESCHLER: What was the basis of her financial situation, what did she make her living doing?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think she came from a rich background, and she must have had some money which was sent to her.

WESCHLER: And did the Blue Four visit here in Los Angeles at any point, some of them?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. I don't think they ever came here.

WESCHLER: So it was all kind of vague.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And I forgot to mention one thing: that [Walter] Gropius made a trip to Los Angeles, I think his only trip to the West Coast ever, and he came to see the Jardinette Apartments, and Mr. Neutra took him

around and showed him things, and I think he was very impressed with them.

WESCHLER: Did you meet him at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: I met him at that time.

WESCHLER: But then again also in Germany.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, later on, yes.

WESCHLER: Well, we'll talk more about him when we get to Germany, I guess.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: Do you have more on your chronology we can continue?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and I also forgot to say that in 1929 we attended citizens school, and I thought I would never pass the examination. Mr. Neutra passed it in June of 1929, because you know he came earlier than I did, and I passed it then a year later.

WESCHLER: Now, by this time you had decided to stay in America?

DIONE NEUTRA: At that time we decided to stay in America.

WESCHLER: How did that happen? How did the change take place?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, because Mr. Neutra had built two buildings here, and we loved the climate, and we could see the possibilities here, and so--

WESCHLER: When you say the possibilities [do you mean] in the sense of Los Angeles as a growing city?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, as a growing city, and that there certainly must be possibility to do something here.

WESCHLER: Meanwhile, back in Germany, the whole modernist [movement] was in full swing. Did you not feel out of it, here in Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we felt very much out of it, but-- I also forgot to mention that Mr. Neutra wrote a lot of articles; that was one way how we had a modest income. He would photograph, he would write about special topics and send them to Austrian magazines and German magazines.

WESCHLER: So he was, in a way, a foreign correspondent for the modernist movement.

DIONE NEUTRA: A foreign correspondent, yes. For instance, he wrote for Die Form, which was a very famous magazine, and he wrote for Der Werkbund das Neue Frankfurt, where Ernst May was the city planner. Mr. Gantner was the editor of das Neue Frankfurt, and at the same time he was also the editor of the trilogy, where Mr. Neutra's book Neues Bauen in der Welt was part of it. It started out only as a contribution to one book, but then apparently the material grew so it became three books: one book was written by [El] Lissitzky, I think, about Russia, and one book was written by Roger Girsburger, who later on married my sister, and

later on, during the resistance, changed his name to Pierre Villon and was for thirty years a Communist deputy in Paris. And then Mr. Neutra wrote the book about America.

WESCHLER: Talking about him writing so much, did writing come easily to him? What was his general style--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --of writing?

DIONE NEUTRA: Writing came easily to him, but--

WESCHLER: Writing in German in these cases?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right, but he had a very convoluted style--is that the right expression?--

WESCHLER: Sure.

DIONE NEUTRA: --convoluted way of expressing himself, which is very difficult when you try to translate his German.

WESCHLER: How was his written German different from his spoken German? Or was it different?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think it was more complicated. And for instance he was horrified when he found out that his father-in-law had Germanized his German; he had taken out many of the--how could I explain it now? He would use words which come from Latin, although there are perfectly good German words for it. And so my father would change them, and Neutra was outraged about it. I have a very interesting letter from my father in my German edition where he gives examples of all these various words which Neutra used.

WESCHLER: Was it a situation where, when he was in intellectual conversation, he would use a more convoluted style of speaking also, or was it really the kind of situation that that convoluted style only arose in his writing?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think it was more in his writing, yes. But I remember that there is one letter in my biography where I was always so fascinated with his conversation that there was simply never anybody in any of the parties which would equal him. Never.

WESCHLER: I vaguely remember reading that letter, right.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I would always be delighted to listen to him. He hated small talk, and so he would just kind--like a professor who'd just speak about something that interested him in order to amuse himself. [laughter] Very often, later on, when we went to a party, I would tell him beforehand, "You know, Richard, there are some interesting people there today, and you have to give them a chance to talk." And if he talked alone, I would pull his coat. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Well, let's return here to 1929 or so, '28, '29. The Lovell house is being built and completed. First of all, was that being watched from abroad? I mean, was that a famous house, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Not yet, not yet.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: That only came after it was published. But there was a long article in the Los Angeles Times, and there was a long article in the Hollywood Citizen News about it.

WESCHLER: But primarily his reputation abroad consisted of the articles that he's sending, and the books that he's writing and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And his book became a best-seller, you know, Wie Baut Amerika?

WESCHLER: I continue to be really fascinated by this decision to stay here. Basically what fascinates me is that by 1933 it's obvious that you'd stay here, but your decision was made well before it became impossible to go back.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: And it really was a positive decision for California.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right, because I still remember the blue sky and the clear mountains and the clear air--it was just intoxicating.

WESCHLER: On a day like this, would you have chosen to stay? [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Maybe not. [laughter]

WESCHLER: (We're in the middle of a second-stage smog alert as we're talking, so--) OK, you have the Lovell house finished, it's a tremendous achievement and so forth,

and now you're all eager for new commissions. What happens?

DIONE NEUTRA: What happens was that for a whole year there was absolutely no work.

WESCHLER: How is this possible?

DIONE NEUTRA: Nothing. Mr. Neutra was just so depressed and so unhappy that my mother wrote then a letter and said, "Why don't you come and visit us here in Zurich? I haven't seen you for seven years and--" Was it seven years? No, it was-- Yes, it was seven years-- No, for six years. And she offered to pay our trip. At the same time there was going to be a CIAM congress in Brussels. CIAM was the--let me see--Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne--International Congress of Modern Architecture--and he was the American delegate. And at first, he couldn't make up his mind.

WESCHLER: How was he chosen as the American delegate? Is that a thing that was unusual?

DIONE NEUTRA: Through Karl Moser. And [Sigfried] Giedion: he was the secretary of it, and Giedion was befriended with Karl Moser, and Werner Moser probably suggested it to him.

WESCHLER: And in terms of Europe, Neutra was considered an authority on American architecture.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, of course, from his book. Wie Baut Amerika? had made him well known.

WESCHLER: OK, so he didn't know at that point whether he wanted to accept this invitation. Before we get to his actual decision to leave, do you have any interpretation of why there wasn't work for that period of time? What happened?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, because the house was so advanced for its time and then we didn't know anybody. I remember there is one letter, you remember, in my biography where he read in the paper that an aviators club wanted to build a new building; so he went there to the president, and apparently he made such an impression on him that, although they were ready to commission another architect, the next week they invited him to come to Bakersfield. And he went there by car, while the president with his girl friend (apparently wives were not invited) flew, and Mr. Neutra drove with his manager, and two wolf cubs in the back of the car. And when they arrived in Bakersfield--

WESCHLER: Wolf cubs?

DIONE NEUTRA: Wolf cubs. Mr. Neutra was handed one wolf cub to hold, and the manager was supposed to hold one wolf cub, but he let go and the wolf cub escaped. And the president, who had arrived meanwhile, and his manager chased that wolf cub and finally cornered him and chased him toward the swimming pool, and the wolf cub jumped in the swimming pool and drowned. And meanwhile, Mr. Neutra

held his wolf cub, and later on there was a great conversation: he was considered the hero, because he had held that wolf cub for such a long time. [laughter] The other man was considered a coward. And then he describes how he flew over the whole situation and took photographs, but apparently nothing came of it.

WESCHLER: Was that his first plane flight?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was-- I guess it must have been, yes. Yes. He doesn't mention it as being his first plane ride, but it probably must have been.

WESCHLER: Was it perhaps that he had a reputation-- In addition to modern, was it expensive architecture, or was it not especially expensive?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. People didn't know about it, and they didn't like it. They thought it was awful. Didn't like it at all.

WESCHLER: It was thought to be ugly?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it was thought to be ugly, you know, everything was Spanish, so--

WESCHLER: Was it also at that point--the Depression arriving, or what, or how did that affect it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I guess the Depression may have started already then.

WESCHLER: So that would have been part--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: Today, by the way, I think we'll just take you up to when you leave. We don't have to go much farther than that.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: But in any case, he decided that he would go to this congress.

DIONE NEUTRA: He decided he would go to his congress, and because he was so depressed, I thought that it would be good for him if he would travel by way of Japan, because that didn't cost any more than to go the other way around.

WESCHLER: Because you had to go by boat in any case?

DIONE NEUTRA: Had to go by boat in any case.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And I couldn't leave for three months, because I didn't have my citizenship papers yet, so I couldn't get an American passport. So Mrs. Davidson took me in very kindly for that period, and I stayed with her. And Mr. Neutra went by way of Japan, Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Canton, and Cairo.

WESCHLER: My goodness. We'll talk next time a little bit about that trip. One thing just hanging from earlier on, we were going to talk a little bit about what happened with Frank in terms of when you then did leave.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Then, also, my brother-in-law who was sixteen years older and was a famous psychiatrist

in Vienna, suggested that we come to Vienna. And Ernst Freud, the son of Professor Freud, suggested that we consult his sister and Professor Freud and take Frank along and have him checked by European authorities.

WESCHLER: And you did do this?

DIONE NEUTRA: And so we took him along. And I went by way of the Panama Canal with Frank and with Dion, and we were supposed to meet Neutra in London.

WESCHLER: Well, maybe we'll start next time with him going one way, you going another, and--

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: --get to your meeting again.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: Very good. Thank you.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

JULY 18, 1978

WESCHLER: As I was saying, I had a few questions that lingered from the last session that I wanted to pursue. The first is that we've several times now come upon the theme of the depressions that Mr. Neutra would go into when he wasn't in the middle of working or so forth. There seems to be a pattern in his life of great activity and then depressions and so forth, and I was wondering whether you can talk a little bit about those moods.

DIONE NEUTRA: This will emerge from year to year. I will talk about it.

WESCHLER: OK, it's just a general theme that--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's a general theme: these depressions just descended on him like a cloud. He would be quite all right in the morning and might, just by noon, be completely devastated. So there must have been maybe some chemical missing in his makeup, because I think-- Didn't I mention the sleeping pill which he took? He didn't sleep very well, so a doctor gave him a Nembutal sleeping pill--I think it was called Demerol--and that had a miraculous effect on him. It did not particularly make him sleep better, but it completely rid him of his depression, which vanished, and all his association faculties blossomed. So whenever he had to make a long-range

lecture engagement, he'd be terrified that it might just be on a day where he was feeling low; but with this sleeping pill, he could, even in his worst depression, give a very creditable lecture. When he felt anyway good and he took that pill, he was absolutely brilliant. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Around what period did he begin taking this?

At what point did this doctor--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think that came pretty late, about 1938 or '39.

WESCHLER: What was the form exactly of the depression?

When you say he was devastated, was it that he--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he just didn't feel that he could make any decisions, and everything which he would take in his stride just loomed like a mountain in front of him, all the obligations which he had.

WESCHLER: Did he have, for example, anxiety as to the value of his contribution?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: It wasn't that; it was more just the immediate, day-to-day things were so enormous?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: For example, during that year 1929, after the Health House was finished--

DIONE NEUTRA: After the Health House was finished, yes.

WESCHLER: --there was a good deal of that? Was it something that happened in stages?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it would come every second day.

WESCHLER: And just throughout his life, right? And did he also feel it was a chemical thing, or is that your interpretation?

DIONE NEUTRA: At that time the science was not advanced enough to mention these things.

WESCHLER: OK, let's begin. He's about to leave on his trip at this point.

DIONE NEUTRA: Before we do that, I would like to mention that the publication of the garden apartments in the Christian Science Monitor, July 12, 1928, evoked interest in the eastern establishment, and eastern magazines started to write him and wanted to do an editorial.

WESCHLER: Even at a time when Los Angeles wasn't paying attention to him, America was beginning to, but still not Los Angeles.

DIONE NEUTRA: Still not Los Angeles, that's right. And also, they were very much interested in a sketch which he did for one of the first drive-in markets.

WESCHLER: Yes.

DIONE NEUTRA: And Willard D. Morgan wrote an article about that in a magazine.

WESCHLER: I also want to talk a little more about his association with Willard D. Morgan.

DIONE NEUTRA: Early in 1930, he worked with Willard Morgan on a book about the Health House. Morgan had to make a photographic diary of the whole procedure, how the Health House was built. And he and Neutra collaborated on a book which they tried to publish, Neutra tried for two years to find a publisher, and I have a huge file with letters from publishers in France and in Germany. But then the Depression came, and nothing came of it, so the book was never published.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Willard Morgan. He's an interesting character.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he was a very tall and solid-built man. And his wife, Barbara, was more volatile, and she was at that time a painter, I think. Later on she became interested in photography, and we very often visited them and they visited us.

WESCHLER: What kind of community did they keep? Were they centers of the whole community themselves?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, they had lots of artistic friends; Annita Delano, for instance, who was a professor at UCLA, was one of their intimate friends.

WESCHLER: And you've become friends with that whole group?

DIONE NEUTRA: We became friends with that whole group.

WESCHLER: I see. We also interviewed Annita Delano in the Oral History Program. Maybe you can give us a sketch of her; that would be interesting.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't remember her enough.

WESCHLER: OK. Very good. [laughter] Anyway, go on.

DIONE NEUTRA: And so I mentioned that my mother offered to finance a trip to Europe. Mr. Neutra was a delegate to the CIAM Congress in Brussels, which I also mentioned last time, and was invited to deliver a paper there. I was so amazed at him, because he couldn't make up his mind to go, too, and he was so vacillating, because he had started, after all, some things here, and he felt that if he went away for several months, then everything which he had gained would be lost. And also he knew that this was a termination with his association with Schindler, and so we didn't know whether we were going to stay in Los Angeles, whether we would stay in Europe. So he went first and I stayed behind, and I was supposed to sell the family car but was not able to. So Conrad Buff, our Swiss painter friend, took our belongings and also kept our car.

WESCHLER: Before you leave the question of Neutra leaving Schindler, how was that at that point? Was that an acrimonious breakup, or was it just--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it was never acrimonious. It was just a slow, slow abating of working together.

WESCHLER: But as you two left, you were leaving the Schindler house, you were vacating that apartment--

DIONE NEUTRA: We were vacating that apartment. I don't remember anything--that we left in anger or anything like that.

WESCHLER: And in later years, did they meet again?

DIONE NEUTRA: In later years, they did not see each other any more, except in 1929--no, in 1930, I think. I will come to that; they both gave lectures at the Chouinard Art Institute, they gave a course on modern architecture.

WESCHLER: But generally, there was a gradual parting of the ways with the two of them.

DIONE NEUTRA: I remember that in 1948 Schindler wrote a letter to the University of Southern California, where he criticized Neutra, and I will come to that in that period.

WESCHLER: OK. As you were leaving Los Angeles--you had vacated the apartment--were you intending to come back?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, we didn't know. We didn't know what we were going to do.

WESCHLER: You put your furniture, for instance, in storage?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, we left it with Conrad Buff.

WESCHLER: I see. And he would theoretically be able to mail it to you wherever you settled?

DIONE NEUTRA: There was hardly any furniture.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was mainly boxes of household goods and those things.

WESCHLER: I see. OK. Fine. So--

DIONE NEUTRA: So, I mentioned that Mr. Neutra went to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Canton, Cairo--

WESCHLER: All that is covered rather well in his autobiography.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And I took my two children and went through the Panama Canal, and that was a wonderful trip, because the captain made a big boat on which he worked during the day when he didn't have much to do, and the children would watch him, and I would have time to practice for hours the cello and learn new cello songs. We were the only passengers, so we had all our meals outside on deck; and there was a swimming pool for the sailors, and the children could swim in the pool, so it was absolutely a magnificent trip. And then Mr. Neutra met me in London.

WESCHLER: So this boat went from Los Angeles to the canal all the way to London?

DIONE NEUTRA: All the way to London. And, of course, you know this was a freighter, and you never know with freighters when they arrive, so I had no idea whether Mr. Neutra would be there. He arrived from Cairo, or from Italy, and he arrived, I think, on a Friday. The boat arrived on Monday. Friday was a holiday, and Saturday was a bank holiday. Sunday, of course, was Sunday, and so he couldn't find out from the agency when the boat would arrive; so he just simply took a chance, and I think he arrived one hour after I arrived. [laughter]

WESCHLER: How long had you been apart at that point?

DIONE NEUTRA: At that point? Only three months.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: So then-- Not even that much. I think he left in June. Two months. And then we visited my sister in Paris; she was married to Roger Girsburger who wrote that book in the trilogy of the three books, when Mr. Neutra wrote the American book. They were both Communists and, of course, very, very much involved in that whole movement at that time. And for us, they were much too fanatic, you know how this whole group is. They were-- what's the name for it?--they were very rigid in their opinions.

WESCHLER: Strident?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and rigid in their whole outlook.

WESCHLER: Doctrinaire?

DIONE NEUTRA: Doctrinaire, that's what I meant.

WESCHLER: Can you describe, just looking ahead, what happened with your relationship with your sister and brother-in-law?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, my sister, unfortunately, died in 1939 in her twenty-ninth year of pneumonia after she had a one-year-old boy. And then my brother-in-law was very much involved in the resistance movement, and I think I mentioned that he changed his name to Pierre Villon, and then became a deputy for thirty years and married a very

wonderful woman, who also became a delegate for many years for the Communist party.

WESCHLER: You mentioned that they were too doctrinaire for you, but you could perhaps give us a little sidelight of Neutra's political persona.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he was antipolitical: for instance, when we voted, I always filled out his ballot--

WESCHLER: Really.

DIONE NEUTRA: --because he said that he distrusted all politicians and all newspapers, and he says, "I don't have time to devote to this."

WESCHLER: Where did that come from, his distrust for politicians?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think from living in Germany during the inflation and reading the newspapers and seeing how the actual life was and how the newspapers reported it.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. It's interesting, because he was interested in social projects, and housing projects and so forth.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: And he had lots of run-ins with politicians.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: But he himself was not particularly interested in which politicians got elected?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: And your politics?

DIONE NEUTRA: I was always very much--very liberal. For instance, we would have voted for Upton Sinclair, and I will speak about that.

WESCHLER: OK. Very good.

DIONE NEUTRA: So after two weeks with my parents--and that was also interesting, because, from my biography, any reader can see how very much devoted my husband was to my mother and vice versa; but their being together was quite unhappy, because suddenly, when people knew that Mr. Neutra was in Europe, he was deluged with lecture engagements, and so he had to prepare these lectures, there was a lot of correspondence, and he was nervous. He wrote me in one of his letters that he gets along with my mother very well if he is able to tune in on her level, but she is not able to tune in on his level. So, if he doesn't have the time to concentrate on that, then she is not able to go along with him.

WESCHLER: What was the level that he would tune in on her? What kinds of things did they talk about?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, they would write about life philosophy, for instance, and about the past and all of the affairs which interested her, other people which interested her.

WESCHLER: That's history and culture but not so much technical architecture.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, no, no, not at all. She just couldn't understand his drive, and she always felt we should take a vacation, and later on she influenced me very badly by being so sorry for myself, and that created quite a difficulty between Mr. Neutra and myself while we were separated. I'll come to that later.

And while we were on this lecture trip, he lectured-- For instance, in Frankfurt we received a telegram from a Mr. [C. H.] Van Der Leeuw from Rotterdam asking whether he could meet Mr. Neutra, and where. And we told him that we would be on a certain day in Basel, at a certain house where we had lunch, because he was on his way to Geneva. So he rang the bell, and we went downstairs, and we talked to him in the car, and we found out that he was the owner of the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, which was one of the most beautiful factories in the world at that time. And he had read Wie Baut Amerika? and he was very much impressed with Mr. Neutra, and he invited him to come to Holland afterwards and lecture in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Utrecht, which we did later. But we did not know how fateful he was going to be in our lives.

And then Mr. Neutra also lectured in Vienna, he lectured in Hamburg, he lectured in Prague and in Berlin.

And there we also visited Mendelsohn again, and I remember that Mr. Neutra insisted that he send him his chauffeur and his car to pick him up, and then he brought us to his house, and that house was a fantastic house, with a huge sliding door that disappeared into the ground.

WESCHLER: Down?

NEUTRA: Down, down into the ground, and it opened up toward a lake; it was a very, very beautiful house. And he lectured in a building which Mendelsohn had designed, and in the front row sat Miës van der Rohe, who was so impressed with Mr. Neutra that he invited him to come for a month to the Bauhaus. So he went to the Bauhaus, and we spent a month there. There was a very amusing incident.

Miës van der Rohe invited us for dinner and we had an awfully good time together. But we came back very late, and when we came back to the Bauhaus, he had forgotten to give us a key to get into the Bauhaus, and so we walked all around but everything was asleep, everything was dark; but we saw an open window in the basement, so they lowered me down into the basement, thinking that I could get out of the basement and open the front door, not knowing that, even in Germany, you have to have a key to open the front door from the inside. Anyway, the basement was locked and I was imprisoned in the dark basement. [laughter] So then they finally found the--how do you call that, the man who--

WESCHLER: The maintenance man.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, the maintenance man, and he opened us up, and he liberated me.

WESCHLER: Can you describe some things about the Bauhaus? First of all, describe Miës van der Rohe.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he was kind of a taciturn man. He didn't speak very much. I mean, you couldn't have a brilliant conversation with him like, for instance, Mr. Neutra would have with Charles Beard later on. But Mr. Neutra liked him very much. We became especially befriended with Lyonel Feininger.

WESCHLER: What kind of a person was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was a charming man. We liked him tremendously. But we were very much interested in a seminar which we attended with Klee, where he criticized, for instance, a drawing which one of his students had made. Well, he criticized it in such minute detail that the student who didn't put his whole heart and soul into that drawing would have just sunk into the floor with shame. So that impressed us very much. I don't remember that we met the other two, Kandinsky and--what was it? Jawlensky? I don't remember them. But Mr. Neutra gave an interview to the students of Cal Poly Pomona in 1968, where he taught a semester, and there he described how amazed he was that Gropius was able to harmonize such a disparate group of

people. He thought that was his greatest accomplishment, that he was able to harmonize all these various artists.

WESCHLER: What did Gropius do? How did he harmonize these people?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think he was very conciliatory, and he tried to see the other person's viewpoint.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was, oh, a kind of a professorial type, but very kind and very interested in everything. And there are some very beautiful letters of exchange between Mr. Neutra and Gropius.

WESCHLER: What exactly was the Bauhaus at that time that you were there, I mean, aside from a group of buildings?

DIONE NEUTRA: Very great influence on the whole of German architecture. Because the Werkbund--the Werkbund magazine--and all these people were published, and they had exhibits, and I think it had a very great influence at that time.

WESCHLER: As a functioning unit, how many students were there at that time, roughly, and how many faculty?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember. I don't remember.

WESCHLER: But, for instance, you stayed in some kind of guest quarters that they had?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we stayed in the guest-- We had a guest room there.

WESCHLER: And what exactly was Neutra's contribution while he was there?

DIONE NEUTRA: He worked with a group of students on the Karkov theater competition; this was a general competition, but he and his students worked on it, too. And that project is published in my biography, and also some letters a year later which tell us what impact Mr. Neutra had on his students. They found him a terrible taskmaster, they complained bitterly that he made them work so hard, but because he was there only for a month, he just got everything out of them which they were capable of.

WESCHLER: What kind of students were these? Were these people who had gone to college elsewhere and then come there, or what was a typical student at the Bauhaus?

DIONE NEUTRA: For instance, there was one student from Yugoslavia, Selman Selmanagic, who became later on, for twenty years, the director of the Art Academy [Kunstakademie] in East Germany, and I come to that in 1968, when we met him again. And there was also Sharon--I've forgotten the name--quite a prominent architect who is now in Israel. He was one of his students.

WESCHLER: And was Neutra influenced by the Bauhaus as much?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not at all. We were so far away during all that period that I don't think that he was influenced.

Then we went to Holland and had this wonderful experience. We stayed in Van Der Leeuw's house. He had a very modern house built by Brinkmann and Van der Flight, the architect who also built the factory. When you lay in bed, you pressed a button, and then the curtains would open electrically, and the water would come into the bathtub. He was very much antismoking, so for anybody who wanted to smoke, there was a little part in the living room where you could put a curtain around it, and there they had to smoke. [laughter] And I saw also for the first time a lazy Susan he had in his flat, which was built into the table, the lazy Susan, where you could serve. And, of course, the whole house was not what you would call gemütlich in German: you know, it was typical Bauhaus and rubber treads on the stairway and much chromium, but it had a beautiful view on the lake.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was this who had this house built?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he was a very interesting man. Mr. Van Der Leeuw's family owned this factory, and when they decided to build, he told them that he wanted that to be his project. Before this modern factory was built, all the health services in the city knew that the workers in the Van Nelle factory would contract tuberculosis, because they had such poor working conditions. And, I think, for

a year he traveled all over the world and studied factory design, and then came up with this marvelous factory with light and wonderful working quarters for the workers. And later on, I think, when he was forty, he decided to become a physician.

WESCHLER: Was he young at this time when you met?

DIONE NEUTRA: When we met him he must have been about thirty-five.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And I think when he was forty he decided to become a physician, and he studied in Vienna and became a student of Freud and also took psychoanalysis with Freud and later became a psychoanalyst; and then returned to Rotterdam and later became the president of the technical high school, one of the biggest schools (I've forgotten the name of the town). We visited him later.

WESCHLER: Was he married?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he was not married. At that time he was not married.

So then Mr. Neutra went to Brussels, and there he met Le Corbusier and went with him to visit the Stocklet house. Stocklet house was one of the famous houses of Josef Hoffmann. Apparently this was quite a wonderful experience, to see that house. Mr. Neutra gave apparently a very good

lecture at the CIAM Congress, and then he went to Cologne and gave another lecture, and then he returned to New York.

WESCHLER: Before we go there, what kind of relationship did he have with Le Corbusier?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he had a very cordial relationship with Le Corbusier.

WESCHLER: Was it frequently that they saw each other or just these one or two times?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, just one or two times. But I think Le Corbusier published in his books a card which Neutra wrote him where he praised him for something, but I don't know what.

WESCHLER: I see. Now he is about to go back, where are you?

DIONE NEUTRA: I stayed with my parents. I didn't come along on this trip. After, I think, Holland, I went back to Zurich.

WESCHLER: Now, what was the reason of this? Was it that he was going to go back to America and try again to get established, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. I did not go back with him, because my parents wanted to keep me longer.

WESCHLER: So, in a way, you were just repeating what you had already done five years earlier.

DIONE NEUTRA: Seven years.

WESCHLER: Seven years earlier.

DIONE NEUTRA: And there are some wonderful letters in my biography where he describes his feelings: that he came again to New York, he said, the famous architect who has no office, who has no job, who has no work, and everybody said, "Why, you must make contacts." And while he was in New York, he desperately tried to make contacts, and in his letters he describes everything which he tries. He was invited to lecture--he gave the first three lectures in the New School of Social Research, and he noticed that in the front sat a small man who always afterwards came and questioned him while he talked about his experience at the Bauhaus: he talked about Miës, he talked about Gropius, and in the lecture which he gave on January 5, he spoke about the relation of the new architecture to the housing problem in America, Europe, and the Far East. On January 7, he spoke about the American contribution to the new architecture. On January 9, he spoke about the skyscraper and the new problem of city planning.

WESCHLER: Who was this little man who had come up?

DIONE NEUTRA: The little man was Joseph Hudnut, dean of the department of architecture at Harvard. He later on employed Gropius to come to Harvard, so Mr. Neutra had always the feeling that he was in a way responsible for this appointment.

WESCHLER: All of his praise.

DIONE NEUTRA: All of his praise, and that Hudnut got to know more about him.

WESCHLER: Let me ask just a question in principle. I mean, he's famous everywhere in the world but America, why does he come back to America? Could he have stayed in Germany and been very successful?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, he tried in Germany. He tried to find out what his chances would be there, but we already noticed the beginning of National Socialism while we were there.

WESCHLER: I wanted to ask, what was Germany like in 1930?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we felt that very strongly.

WESCHLER: How did you feel it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, it was-- It was a disagreeable atmosphere. The articles in the papers, you know, already started to be in such a way that after having experienced the freedom of America, of California, that we didn't feel comfortable about it. And so we decided that we wanted to go back, and especially because, I think, while we were in Zurich it rained for three months, and so we just remembered the blue sky and the clear mountain air of California. But we didn't know what our chances would be; whether he would get any commissions in New York or in Chicago, where he lectured later--we didn't know.

WESCHLER: So you didn't know for sure you'd come back to L.A., it was just you were going to come back to America.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. That's right.

WESCHLER: Was the feeling of kind of political despair pervasive at the Bauhaus? Were people talking about that at the time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, they were already talking about it at that time. Yes. And then, you know, there was still the Versailles treaty and this whole feeling of despair in the German public.

WESCHLER: It felt--

DIONE NEUTRA: --not hope-- It was just very disagreeable.

WESCHLER: So it was a very closed atmosphere, as opposed to the openness of the United States, and that drew you back.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That drew us back.

WESCHLER: Before we go further with him in the United States, we've still got you in Europe. What are you doing?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Well, I came to Zurich, and when my mother saw me, she was just horrified, first about Frank, who was then seven years old, and whom she had left a beautiful, radiant, laughing little boy, and here she saw a very stressed, distressed [boy], and a boy who had temper tantrums and cried a lot. And we then put him in a home, where he was being studied for several months.

WESCHLER: Where was this?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was at the Stefansburg in Zurich. And, of course, I came with secondhand clothes and probably made a very disheveled impression on my mother. So then she bought me new clothes, and I could again have singing lessons and cello lessons, and I was in seventh heaven, because she took care of Dion and I had time to practice a lot. And all the difficulties of these first years, that I had so little time with my husband, first on account of his book, then on account of the Health House-- Then he wrote me the most glowing love letters from the boat, how he would have time for me and that he would change his way. But he didn't know that all these lecture engagements were engulfing him; so during his whole trip, although it was interesting, we again had no time for each other. So I felt really quite despaired and didn't know what to think. I wrote him: "Here the years slip by, and what happens to our personal relationship?" I wrote him letters which distressed him greatly, and also my mother enforced me in my feeling sorry for myself.

WESCHLER: Reinforced you.

DIONE NEUTRA: Reinforced my feelings. But fortunately, the way Mr. Neutra answered me and wrote me got me back on the right track. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Were you thinking of separation at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I never thought of a separation. I knew

that fundamentally there was nothing wrong with us; only, I didn't know how to break this compulsive work, where he felt all the things which he felt he had to do.

WESCHLER: How did his letters get you back on the right track?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, they were very beautiful letters, which will be in my biography. [laughter]

WESCHLER: What happened with Frank, by the way, just to continue our discussion of him.

DIONE NEUTRA: My brother-in-law, who was sixteen years older than Mr. Neutra, a psychiatrist, suggested that we come to Vienna, that he would have a look at the boy. And Mr. Neutra's friend Ernst Freud suggested that we see his father and his sister Anna Freud. So I made a trip to Vienna with Frank, and Professor Freud and Anna Freud observed him for a week.

WESCHLER: What does that mean? How did they observe him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I went there every day, and she would spend an hour with him.

WESCHLER: With you there in the room, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I was not there.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And while here, the child guidance clinic had simply labeled him as feeble-minded. Professor Freud was the first one, and also Professor Poetzel, who was a

very famous neurosurgeon at the University of Vienna, diagnosed him that this was a brain injury, that his intellect was OK, but that the speech center had apparently been damaged. We, at that time, were thinking that we should leave Frank in an institution in Germany, because here there was nothing comparable with what they had in Europe. But Professor Freud dissuaded me; he said that he thought that I could help him more than any institution, that I should take him home. And that was a very, very difficult decision for me, because with my renewed musical training, for instance, my cello teacher told me that a very famous cellist had been lost in me, because I could have become a very famous cellist. And the same thing was said by my singing teacher. And I thought I would come back and play in an orchestra and help Mr. Neutra earn some money. Also I knew that Dion and Frank had a very bad relationship with each other. But Frank was so attached to me that I simply didn't have the heart to abandon him. I had no chance to talk this over with Mr. Neutra, because I had to make a decision right then and there, because in June I had already tickets for the boat. And so I decided I would take this burden on me and see what I could do with this boy myself.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Freud? It's not many people in the world who've had direct interactions with him.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Well, he was a very kindly and a professorial man. Mr. Neutra, I think in this interview with his students at Cal Poly, he describes how Freud, when he visited him, he found him not sitting at his desk but lying at his desk. And he felt that this distribution of the weight gave him the idea of putting his clients on couches, because he did that himself. Also he was an art collector. At that time they discovered naturalistic masks on Egyptian mummies, and a dealer came to Berlin to sell these masks to the museum. He also went to London, but both of these institutions didn't buy them; but Freud liked them so much that he bought three of them. He also had a wonderful collection of gold pieces. Anna Freud was very, very kind to us, and I have quite a few letters from her later on, when we came back to Los Angeles.

WESCHLER: What is your sense of their relationship, Anna Freud and her father?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, she admired her father very much, and was very helpful, and I think it was a beautiful cooperation.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. The clichéd version of Freud is how serious and strict he was; that's the popular image of Freud, a very strict analyst. Did you have that sense?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I didn't have that sense at all. And also, Mr. Neutra, you know, spent several vacations with

his children, and he thought that he was very interested in his children and was a very kind father.

WESCHLER: Well, OK. How long, by the way, had you been in Europe? When did Richard leave as opposed to when you left in June, and when did he come back to the United States?

DIONE NEUTRA: He left in May, and he took the boat at the end of November.

WESCHLER: So you'd been apart eight months.

DIONE NEUTRA: We were together-- Yes-- Oh, no--

WESCHLER: No, I'm talking about from Europe: when did he leave Europe to come to the United States again?

DIONE NEUTRA: In November, and I came in June of the following year.

WESCHLER: I see, OK. Right.

DIONE NEUTRA: He also gave on March 19, 1931, a lecture at the Association of Art and Industry, "Northern Architecture and Industrial Art."

WESCHLER: Where is this?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's in New York. Also, the Museum of Science and Industry commissioned him to-- No, that happened already while he was in Europe, and Harwell Harris helped him with that.

WESCHLER: This is the museum here, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: The Museum of Science and Industry in New York.

WESCHLER: In New York.

DIONE NEUTRA: To make a model of the Health House. And Harwell Harris, you know, was one of his students at the Academy of Modern Art and at that time took courses at Frank Wiggins Trade School in Los Angeles, where he was one of the instructors who told him of a model maker in Pasadena, and they made a steel model of the Health House, and that was for many, many years exhibited in New York.

WESCHLER: A rather indestructible model, it sounds like.

DIONE NEUTRA: Indestructible model. We tried to find out where it was, because in 1976, I think, they had an exhibit in Washington about immigrants, and at that time I had telephone calls whether I would tell them where they could get that model. But we found out that in 1940 the Museum of Science and Industry was disbanded, and nobody knows what happened to the model.

But now the most interesting thing happened while Mr. Neutra was in New York. It started already while we were traveling through Europe. He received a telegram from Philip Johnson, "Where is Neutra? I have a job for him." And while we were traveling through Europe, we heard off and on that a huge American car had come by with two men, one with a red beard and a young man. They had been talking about that Mr. Neutra would design the Museum of Modern Art, and that was Philip Johnson and [Henry]-Russell Hitchcock. But, of course, nothing came of it.

But Philip Johnson was at that time a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, and he recommended Mr. Neutra to his father [Homer H. Johnson], who was a lawyer in Cleveland. And he in turn invited Mr. Neutra to a lunch to meet the president [Arthur Vining Davis] of the Aluminum Corporation [of America, ALCOA] and asked him whether he would be willing to design a Greyhound--a bus, an aluminum bus, because the aluminum corporation, which was at that time just starting a completely new corporation, was interested and tried to interest the White Motor Company, which is the biggest bus company who designs buses, to change from a wood frame to an aluminum frame and try to make a prefabricated bus. In my biography, I have the most wonderful letters describing how Mr. Neutra, who doesn't know anything about buses, who doesn't know anything about automobiles, comes to Cleveland, rents a tuxedo, mixes with the high society of Cleveland, is put up in a magnificent club, eats in a diner in order to save money at noon, tries to impress the technical personnel, finds out that all the technicians are against this new-fangled idea of an aluminum bus, how to behave like a big expert whom they paid \$150 a day, which was absolutely fabulous at that period.

WESCHLER: Astonishing.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was fantastic. At the same time he surreptitiously tried to find out how one designs buses.
[laughter]

WESCHLER: He was pumping them for information?

DIONE NEUTRA: At the same time he behaved like a big shot. And I'm so happy that Thomas Hines found in the UCLA Neutra room a brochure which he produced at that time, to the complete satisfaction of the higher-ups. Later on, Arthur Millier wrote in 1930 an article in the Los Angeles Times, an interview with Mr. Neutra, where he describes the impediments of making a prefabricated bus, because each state had different regulations how to put the baggage: in the southern states it was on the top, because the people would have chicken coops and iron bars and big objects which had to be put up on the top of the bus; while in the western states, with these long hauls, all the baggage was below the seating, as it is today. So at that time, a prefabricated bus was simply not possible. This development had to wait twenty years to become a reality.

WESCHLER: But his designs do still exist.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, they still do exist. And we lived for a whole year from the earnings, because during the whole of 1931, there was again no job, when we came back to California. But before we came to California, he was

invited to lecture at the-- [pause]

WESCHLER: Why don't I turn over the tape while you're looking for that name.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. OK

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

JULY 21, 1978

WESCHLER: We've just finished talking about your yearly letter from 1934. Are you continuing to read it from that letter?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I'm--

WESCHLER: Still that same letter. How did these work? How often-- Did you do these every year?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I did these every year. And I started in 1933, and then, later on, whenever we made trips with my husband. Let's say you would come to Nepal, and there would be a family who would take us around and I knew I would never come to Nepal again, but I had the feeling that if they would live in Los Angeles we would become very intimate friends, so I invited them to become a member. I called it my Yearly Club. I said, "You will receive from me a detailed account of my life every year, but, in return, I expect from you a report about your life."

WESCHLER: How large did this club become?

DIONE NEUTRA: I once sent out 120 letters, and the letters were thirty pages long, because we had made a trip to Africa and a trip to Asia in that year.

WESCHLER: But what's wonderful is that these letters still exist, and they do offer a complete historical documentation.

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely, absolutely. Otherwise, I mean, I'd completely forgotten about the migratory workers. And I think that's very interesting. In the spring, we took a three-day bus ride to Chicago to see the world's fair, and you might be interested in some remarks about that.

WESCHLER: Both of you together, or he alone?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, we both were together. And it was July, and we sat in front, and it was terribly hot. At breakfast we would make a sandwich for our lunch, and while the other people would sit in a smoky lunchroom, we both looked for a grassy place to lie down; and after you had sat up all night--it was three nights in the bus--you have no idea how marvelous it was to stretch out on the grass.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: I can imagine.

DIONE NEUTRA: Anyway, the exposition-- The exhibition was on the whole disappointing, the buildings not being modern, but theater decorations, and especially the small houses, very bad. On the other hand, the expositions in the science building about chemistry, physics, mathematics, geology were fascinating. The electrical part, the diverse villages with their folk dances, shows, very stimulating and funny.

And then, October 1934, I reported to my mother how Upton Sinclair was defeated in the bid for governor.

We noticed this: while returning from a trip to San Francisco, in each village were huge posters quoting from his writing to frighten the voter.

WESCHLER: Had you met him personally?

DIONE NEUTRA: We had met him several times.

WESCHLER: Can you describe what your impressions of him were?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was kind of a scholarly type. There was a Mrs. Crane, from the Crane Plumbing Fixtures, who was a very, very forward-looking person, and she had a kind of a salon in Pasadena, and Upton Sinclair was a very good friend of hers, apparently, and in that group we met him. But, I mean, you know, we just greeted him; he never visited us here. But I remember that we were in the Shrine Auditorium looking at--I've forgotten what it was--dances or something, and in between they would flash the results of the elections.

WESCHLER: So you were that actively involved in hoping he would win.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, we were very much interested in Upton Sinclair.

WESCHLER: Did you do any active campaigning on his behalf?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no.

WESCHLER: I see. Had he won, do you think that some of these public projects that Neutra worked on would have come into fruition?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. I'm sure. During this trip to San Francisco he also met Otto Winkler, a Swiss architect with whom he then had an association, which lasted for about eight years, and he did all the working plans for the houses in San Francisco.

WESCHLER: One thing which should be helpful, actually, is to get a sense of what his office was like in 1934. He's suddenly beginning to have success.

DIONE NEUTRA: I wrote a letter to Mrs. Toplitz, whom I mentioned--no, to Mrs. Beard I wrote a letter, and this is what I said: "I will write you a few words before resuming my specification writing. We are swamped with work. Just for curiosity's sake I will tell you what we are working at. The main thing is of course the school, which is a lot of red tape [Corona Avenue School in Bell]. Then, frequent visits to your house . . . [that's a house for her son William Beard], plans for a private boys school [a military academy]."

WESCHLER: California Military Academy.

DIONE NEUTRA: Academy.

A subsistence homestead colony in the Coachella Valley, a small apartment, alterations on an old house, plans for a world's fair in San Francisco, city plans for

the bridge approaches in San Francisco, a very vital question now. Mr. Neutra had to rush up there for a few days, four different prospects, four small houses, talking with the clients, looking at their lots. Preparation for a big publication of up-to-date schools, which the Architectural Forum wants to publish. Preparation of photographs for the one-man show in the Museum of Modern Art, articles, letters. Poor Mr. Neutra is like a swimmer in a turbulent sea, trying to get sufficient air in his lungs. I have a lot of typing to do. Meanwhile the children run wild, and nearly all of these projects are just pipe dreams but keep us all working. We all felt very discouraged about the election outcome, but if you had seen the vicious antipropaganda, you would have been surprised about the big vote which Sinclair pulled just the same. He seems to want to carry on in his writing a book, I, Governor of California: And How I Got Licked.* It should stir up quite some interest.

WESCHLER: With all this activity going on, how many people were working in the office here? Well, first of all, was the office here, at the house?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Peter Pfisterer was a Swiss architect, and Mr. Ain, and then we had a few apprentices. I don't think there were more than maybe four or five at most.

WESCHLER: And meanwhile, during this period, Gregory Ain was living in the apartment--

DIONE NEUTRA: --was living in the apartment downstairs.

WESCHLER: I see. How did that relationship evolve? He continued to work for a year or so and then went off on his own, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I have a letter where I write to my mother (I just read it to my sister yesterday) that Ain

* I, Candidate for Governor, and How I Got Licked

wrote a very impertinent letter wanting to become Mr. Neutra's partner, having insight into the books and into all the financial affairs. And then I just printed for-- Should I read that letter?

WESCHLER: Well, you can just describe it.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Well, Mr. Neutra wrote Mr. Ain a letter where he made a proposal to him. But then, later on, I think after a few years, he found out that he was working on the General Electric competition while he was working for Mr. Neutra here. Mr. Neutra had been wondering why he was so sleepy and didn't devote his time to the projects at hand, and the reason was that he worked at night on this General Electric competition, for which he did not win a prize. Mr. Neutra did win a second prize.

WESCHLER: Both of them were submitting two separate projects?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was not ethical.

WESCHLER: That was a conflict of interests.

DIONE NEUTRA: That was a conflict of interests.

WESCHLER: And basically, what became of their friendship, or their collaboration, as the years went by? Did this tension--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he left then. I don't know when he left, and we did not see much of him after that.

WESCHLER: Did that happen frequently, that people who had started as apprentices and students would work with him for awhile and then need to get their own space?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And he was always very unhappy about that, because he had invested so much effort teaching them, you know, that he felt that at least he should reap the fruits of all this effort.

WESCHLER: Did he take satisfaction in the work that they went on to do? Was he able to enjoy Ain's work?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. I remember that [Raphael] Soriano really never worked in the office. He would come occasionally in the evening, and his first designs were absolute copies of Mr. Neutra's architecture, and that made Mr. Neutra not very happy. But now he has become a great fan of him and calls him master and acknowledges how much he had learned from him.

WESCHLER: One other question I had about the migratory workers' projects: how did the workers and the unemployed people respond to some of these proposals for orange-crate architecture and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember. I have no recollection of that.

WESCHLER: It would be interesting to know what migratory workers in the Imperial Valley thought of modernist architecture and architecture based on orange crates.

DIONE NEUTRA: They couldn't, because it was never built.

WESCHLER: But just even the proposals--would they have liked to have seen it done, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I think they would have. Because, I mean, they were so much superior than what they had, the shacks which they had.

WESCHLER: So, returning to your notes.

DIONE NEUTRA: Now we come to 1935, and I want to read again my little letter [where] I describe the prospects Neutra wrote on. He often had to take a night bus to San Francisco, where Otto Winkler did the working plans for two small houses. He also started on the All Steel House for Josef Von Sternberg, and this is what I write about him:

"Josef Von Sternberg was a famous"--I'm translating

here from the German--"was a famous"--berüchtigte--

Let me see--

notorious director, who discovered Marlene Dietrich in Germany and brought her here. He gave Neutra the commission to design a house for him, which, however, was not supposed to cost more than one week's salary, which was \$7,500. He bought a piece of land where no other in the film world would think of buying one, and for this reason also the house should be completely different, and that was in Chatsworth, which was at that time just green meadows. He was especially interested to be secured from burglars. The whole house is built out of steel, with a main living room going through two stories in which the upper story is at the same time a picture gallery, and it opens up on a wide oval patio with a black terrazzo floor, and the walls are aluminum-coated. Around the building is a wide water moat. The bathroom is completely out of mirrors, where everything is mirrored, which looks very strange. All the doors open inward so that one can go from one room to the other along the windows and can see the beautiful view. All sorts of difficulties arose, because whenever Mr. Von Sternberg lost his position, he wanted to retract. When he got another position and earned some more money, he wanted to make the house bigger. And so

I remember they had one meeting which lasted, I think, until four o'clock in the morning. Every two hours I would wake up and I would try to listen. We had kind of a folding door here, and I said, "Damn! They're still talking!"

WESCHLER: Basically, what was Von Sternberg's interest in having a modernist house?

DIONE NEUTRA: He just wanted to be different.

WESCHLER: Was it primarily that he wanted to be different?

DIONE NEUTRA: Wanted to be different.

WESCHLER: Did he have a continental sensibility because of having been aware of modernist architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think so.

WESCHLER: Did he have other modernist tastes in terms of art and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. But his furniture was awful. We rushed there in order to photograph the house before he put his furniture in. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Can you describe him? You gave some little bits.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I have no memory of him, because I hardly ever met him because at that time I was not present at the sessions with clients.

WESCHLER: When you say that it was going to be done for \$7,500, is that the whole house was going to be done for that, or that's how much he wanted to spend?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, the whole house was supposed to be built for that.

WESCHLER: And if the house was going to be done for \$7,500 at that point, how much would Neutra get as an architect's fee?

DIONE NEUTRA: Seven hundred and fifty dollars.

WESCHLER: For all that.

DIONE NEUTRA: For all that work.

WESCHLER: So basically, this is an extremely famous house, and for that house he got \$750?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: That was standard for that period?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was 10 percent, yes, of the building sum.

WESCHLER: And that was the standard?

DIONE NEUTRA: And do you know that the house has been demolished now?

WESCHLER: I understood. Can you tell me, how did that happen? Why was that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, in the intervening thirty years, or forty years, the whole neighborhood changed. This became all contractor-built, little houses.

WESCHLER: Tract houses.

DIONE NEUTRA: Tract houses, and this was a big property, which nobody would buy, because the surroundings were not suitable anymore.

WESCHLER: Who were some of the people, after Von Sternberg, who lived there? Do you have any idea?

DIONE NEUTRA: A Dr. ["Buzzy"] Hill lived there for many, many, many years. He was a physician who worked-- What is that place called? You know, where-- A sanitarium? In Pomona or so.

WESCHLER: We can fill it in.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it's a famous sanitarium. . .

WESCHLER: We'll fill that in. Don't worry.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, which is supported by Jewish money. I have forgotten the name. I'm very poor at names.

WESCHLER: Don't worry. [City of Hope]

DIONE NEUTRA: But, of course, the house cost more than \$7,500 eventually, because Richard always told him it would cost more, but he didn't believe him. So then when the bids came in he was very wrought up; but then he had again a very good job, so then-- He ordered all the material he needed per airplane in order to get the house finished in time.

WESCHLER: And just finishing the story of how it got demolished, was there any attempt to save it before it was demolished? Or was it just suddenly discovered that it had been demolished?

DIONE NEUTRA: Suddenly it was discovered and nobody made an attempt to save it.

WESCHLER: How many years ago was this, roughly?

DIONE NEUTRA: After Mr. Neutra's death, so it must have been maybe five or six years ago.

WESCHLER: How did you react when you heard about it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I thought it was too bad. But, I mean, this is how our society is, you know. When you see what happened to the Landfair building in Westwood, how they desecrated it--it looks awful now. It's owned by a cooperative of students of UCLA.

WESCHLER: What kind of impact-- Did other people, other directors and actors and so forth, seeing the Von Sternberg house, want Neutra houses? Did that lead to other jobs?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I forgot: Ayn Rand lived there for many years.

WESCHLER: Oh, that was hers! I didn't realize that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. She lived there for many years. And we visited an evening with her. She was a very vivacious, intellectual woman. And I was struck that her husband was the one who served the meal and apparently bought everything in order to make it possible for her to write.

WESCHLER: So. Did the house's existence bring a whole group of Hollywood people to Neutra that otherwise wouldn't have come?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not at all. It had no consequence.

WESCHLER: And it was way out in the middle of nowhere, so no one saw it.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: Was it a house that people doing architectural tours in Los Angeles would go out of their way to go see?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Later on they would.

WESCHLER: But in those early days, after it had been built, it was just--

DIONE NEUTRA: Flash in the pan.

WESCHLER: OK.

DIONE NEUTRA: "In the spring came a telegram from New York that Neutra had won the only gold medal and two first prizes for three houses in the Better Homes of America Competition--the first time that the same architect won so many prizes. He was too poor to make a trip to New York so Dean [Joseph] Hudnut gave the prize over a nationwide radio hookup. And then they made a"--let me see-- "then they made models of these three prizewinning houses, and they were exhibited in the San Diego World's Fair, in 1935." And then I write:

Unfortunately, we have not found a way how I can achieve it that Richard has a few leisure hours during the week. Nobody can apparently understand that also an architect has a right to some leisure and should have a free Sunday. But, on the contrary, every client assumes that it's a special pleasure for him to spend a Sunday morning or a Sunday afternoon to go to see his lot and to immediately start to make plans. People call up after eleven o'clock at night sometimes. Who can stand that, when he gets up at five o'clock in the morning and has to work until late at night without a Sunday to catch up?

WESCHLER: That's an amazing life. And at the same time you're indicating that you were--for all the work--you weren't really making enough money to be out of marginal subsistence.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, because these were all small houses, you see.

WESCHLER: Can you describe, while we're here, just incidentally, how the children were during this period? They've been growing up.

DIONE NEUTRA: The children were growing up--let me see; in my 1935 yearly letter I wrote, "Unfortunately it is still so that despite so much work, the objects are so small that they are not big enough to nourish a regular office, and thus he has to work with students, except two collaborators. One is going to leave us soon because there was a lot of friction since months." That was Ain. "We have six students who work with the greatest enthusiasm, but the whole responsibility is of course on Richard. And so we are nearly afraid to take new work."

WESCHLER: When you say "students," what were they students out of? He had classes at this institute?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, they were students from universities--

WESCHLER: --who would come over here just to work--

DIONE NEUTRA: --who would come over here and work.

WESCHLER: --as apprentices.

DIONE NEUTRA: But, you know, even after you have studied for six years architecture and you come to an architect's office, it takes a year until you really have learned to be of help. So it's a shame.

WESCHLER: So in addition to everything else, he was spending time teaching people.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That's right.

WESCHLER: Looking ahead, at what point did you reach a kind of financial stability? How long was it before then?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, it started with the Brown house, because that was a big commission in 1936; that was the first time that I bought Mr. Neutra a new suit. But I'll come to that.

WESCHLER: I see, OK.

DIONE NEUTRA: Let's see-- And then, on May 13, he received a second prize in the General Electric competition.

WESCHLER: This was the competition that Ain had also worked on.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and I think this is quite interesting, if I'll read about that.

Two thousand four hundred projects were submitted. Seventy-five percent of these projects were already modern, although not very good modern. But the attempt was there. And now General Electric sends around a big portfolio with pictures of houses which were started in 1830 and show the development up to 1935. Now comes the new American house and then comes a description why one now builds modern style. This could have been written by Richard. At

the end of this portfolio is a pocket with thirteen sheets of the prizewinners and fifty sheets of the honorable mentions, which any contractor can buy for twenty-five dollars, and he can choose of which he would like to have plans and specifications made. The plan of the General Electric is to build a house for 100,000 inhabitants. The houses should be finished by the first of September, and then they will be opened to the public, and millions of people all across the country will suddenly be able to see a modern house, the beginning of a new development. Very interesting for us to observe this.

WESCHLER: What became of that?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't know. I don't know, can't say.

He had then started a terrible-- No, then he designed a house at Palos Verdes and had endless difficulties with the art jury. Myron Hunt and Dave Allison, two very famous Spanish-style architects, were on the jury, and especially when Frank Lloyd Wright tried to intervene and help Mr. Neutra, they were very much upset and gave him endless difficulties.

WESCHLER: This was a jury for a building in Palos Verdes?

DIONE NEUTRA: This was an art jury for every building in Palos Verdes. Even today--

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: --every building has to have a tile roof.

WESCHLER: Oh, I see. I see. Uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: And Mr. Neutra built--later on he built, I think, three houses and a high school in Palos Verdes.

WESCHLER: With tile roofs?

DIONE NEUTRA: With tile roofs. He also worked on the Landfair Apartments, which would cause him endless difficulties and annoyances; but that comes in the next year. Let me see if there's anything else. No.

Now comes 1936. And I quote from my yearly letter (and I again translate from the German): "This year, I think, has been the most difficult of our life together. It started very well, because the board of education commissioned Richard to build the Emerson Junior High School, a building of \$225,000, which is now under construction."

One morning Neutra had suddenly terrible pains in his abdomen, but the family doctor couldn't find anything; so my sister who worked at that time for Rudolph Marx, who was a very excellent surgeon, said to him, "Why don't you come to the office and we will examine you?" So when he came-- [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] So he discovered--he thought it was an appendix, so he didn't let him get off the operating table but called an ambulance; and then he called a consultant and the consultant said, "Why don't we wait?" And Dr. Marx said, "No, I think I should operate right away." And the appendix broke in his hand, while he took it out. And then the next day-- Now, I must read that:

This operation took place two days before the

preliminaries for the school building had to be delivered, and Neutra was, of course, full of despair that he might lose this job. So every day, while he was hanging around with his bottle, you know, intravenous feeding, Mr. Pfisterer came and the engineer came, and they had hour-long discussions. And the nurses wrung their hands, but the doctor, who was a friend of ours, realized that it had to be that way. Couldn't be any other way.

WESCHLER: And it did not jeopardize the project?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it didn't. Then, ten days after the operation-- No, then he didn't get better, and it was decided that one had to take his tonsils out, and that was a terrible, very painful operation. And ten days after the operation, at three o'clock in the morning, he had a hemorrhage, and we didn't want to disturb the doctor and called him only at eight o'clock, to find out that he had gone fishing and would not be back until the evening. Meanwhile, Mr. Neutra just had a whole bowl full of blood, and then his assistant couldn't stop the bleeding. All during the day he tried everything, but he couldn't still the blood, until finally in the evening the doctor came back, and then he did. But Richard was so weak and didn't get better, and he had to hire eleven draftsmen, because inside of seven weeks thirty-six big sheets had to be delivered. So Richard got up between five and six every morning to write the specifications and to prepare the program for all the draftsmen. It was a terrible time until the plans could be delivered at the right time. And then one evening he forgot to

turn on the lights and fell down the steps and broke his right arm.

WESCHLER: Not a good time!

DIONE NEUTRA: That was--that was awful.

WESCHLER: When you say that 1936 was the most difficult year together, is that all these physical things making it difficult?

DIONE NEUTRA: It was all these physical things.

WESCHLER: And yet, at the same time, it was a year when he was fairly successful with his work.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: In fact, if he weren't so successful it wouldn't have been such a problem with the physical things--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: --in terms of how difficult it made the recovery. What were some of the other projects that he was doing during this year?

DIONE NEUTRA: This comes now-- Just a minute. Then one morning-- We had at that time six draftsmen or apprentices, and all these architects in America are not educated for teamwork: each of them wants to be an individual genius, and this always caused very great difficulties.

WESCHLER: Is it different in Europe?

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely different in Europe.

WESCHLER: How so? How does it work in Europe? That

basically there is one person--

DIONE NEUTRA: It is especially different from the people from the eastern region of Europe. We had several people who came from Yugoslavia, and I think we also had a Pole, and that was such a difference, because these people were so eager to learn and to bring back something to their country in order to help build up their country.

WESCHLER: But in terms of European-- For instance, was it different in Mendelsohn's office, in Berlin, I mean, that people didn't want to cooperate with each other?

DIONE NEUTRA: Mr. Neutra never spoke about that.

WESCHLER: But basically his American apprentices were all more difficult employees; my question basically is whether that would be true in Europe, too, that people were less cooperative.

DIONE NEUTRA: I think it's probably [so]. And then in order to give Mr. Neutra some peace, we decided that on Sunday morning, on Sundays, I would answer the phone, and I would say that he was not in, unless it was something important. He would listen, and if he felt it was important, then he would answer. And one day a telephone call came, saying, "Newport Beach, Rhode Island." Let me see, the telephone call went, "Here's Mr. Brown from Rhode Island. Mr. Neutra, would you be interested to build a small house for us on Fishers Island?" And Mr. Neutra

said, "Is Mrs. Brown also interested?" And he said, "Oh, yes, she's also interested." Because it was our problem that usually it was either the man or the wife, but very rarely both of them were interested in modern architecture, which meant Mr. Neutra always had to spend so much time in persuasion of the other party. Just a minute, I can find something about that. Yes. Richard asked him all sorts of questions in order to be able to come prepared, because he wanted him to come to the East. Then he wrote Mr. Brown a letter and enclosed an agreement and asked him to send him a check to cover the per diem and the travel, because he had no idea what kind of a man that was. In fact, we had him investigated by Dun and Bradstreet.

WESCHLER: Really!

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. We were absolutely dumbfounded when we found out that he was called the Million-Dollar Baby, because before he was born, his father and his uncle died, and he inherited all the wealth; his ancestors were the founders of Rhode Island and founded Providence, so that 150 years later, while Napoleon rushed Egypt, their clippers were trading in Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong, and they built their two town palaces in Providence.

I saw a picture of the Brown clipper in Hong Kong Bay, and this house was built in 1906, when the present John Nicholas was six. Now Brown's built again with

that Austro-Californian. Mrs. Brown is a southerner from Virginia. Her ancestors built their mansion at Baltimore, Maryland, in that very same year, 1792, when Brown's ancestors built their house in Rhode Island. It is now a museum. I saw a model of Mrs. Brown's house under glass, and her huge collection of European tin soldiers in grand mirrored cases. Interesting Watteau and Fragonard drawings, the Browns adored Schönbrunn and love old Vienna. Dr. Neville, art historian of Harvard University, rushed around New England with me and the Browns, phoned for trains. [No, that comes later.]

WESCHLER: How had Brown become interested in modern architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art.

WESCHLER: I see, and so perhaps through Philip Johnson, for instance.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and he told us that they had studied the buildings of [J.J.P.] Oud, Wright, Mies, but after seeing the gold-medal Beard house had decided on Neutra.

WESCHLER: So Neutra wanted a per diem and a check, and he sent for that. What kind of per diem did he get for this time?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember. But I only remember that I went for the first time in my life to Bullocks Wilshire and bought him a new suit. Everything had been secondhand before that. I got a new shirt, new shoes, and new suit and an umbrella. [laughter]

WESCHLER: And so he left.

DIONE NEUTRA: And so he left.

WESCHLER: It would be interesting, just a ballpark figure of what the per diem would be at that time, just roughly--not exactly, but in the neighborhood.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, maybe thirty dollars.

WESCHLER: Thirty dollars a day?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, maybe something like that. And we had--let's see--

I always thought that if he had more work this would solve our problems; but this is not the case. We see approaching a big building boom. Also, the five prizes which Richard received in the last year have made such an impression on the present architects that quite a few are now trying to build modern houses. Two contractors are building a modern apartment house, modern insofar that they have rounded windows and corner windows and metal windows and chromium. Pretty bad. But there will be quite a bit of such houses pretty soon. In any case, it is now not difficult anymore to sell modern architecture.

Clients who come to Richard come mostly because they see the publications in American and foreign magazines. And they come because they like this kind of architecture and must not be convinced anymore.

WESCHLER: So that's a fascinating transformation that's taking place in five years--

DIONE NEUTRA: Five years.

WESCHLER: --from 1930 to 1935.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: You would basically date the real upsurge of modernist architecture in Los Angeles around 1935, that was when it became acceptable.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, after the exhibit of the Museum of Modern Art.

WESCHLER: At

DIONE NEUTRA: At Bullocks [Wilshire, 1932].

WESCHLER: What allowed-- You say that you were expecting a boom and so forth, can you describe financial conditions? This is still the middle of the Depression. What was allowing it? Was it FHA loans?

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess FHA loans.

WESCHLER: And that in itself allowed a lot of building.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: And the FHA was open to modernist kind of buildings, they didn't care--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not at all; that was always a battle. For instance, Mr. Neutra built several houses with FHA loans, and I think for the Beard house was the first time that he used a sliding door, and the Arcadia Company, metal company, made it for him. I think this was the first metal glass sliding door detailed in the United States. And he had to convince the FHA to allow him to put the living room with a sliding glass door toward the garden, because in all the Spanish houses the living room, with a big

window, is toward the street, and the kitchen is towards the backyard.

WESCHLER: So part of the drama of the whole modernist upsurge in California was trying to get around bureaucrats who were also opposed to it.

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely.

WESCHLER: Not only clients but bureaucrats.

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely.

WESCHLER: Were there any instances where bureaucrats forbade certain kinds of things that he wanted to do?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. I don't remember any particulars, but I'm sure that he had great difficulties with them.

WESCHLER: Were there any other causes, do you think, for the upsurge of building in California in 1935 or '36 besides FHA?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think it was a general recovery under Roosevelt.

WESCHLER: And it already was beginning.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was already beginning.

WESCHLER: Financial conditions were looking better.

DIONE NEUTRA: And at that time Mr. Neutra also introduced for the first time a light strip on the overhang so that the light source would enter from the outside, which eliminated the reflections of the

lights on the inside glass front. And it also would illuminate the landscape outside. So that, for instance, people who had a sliding door into a garden wouldn't have to close the curtains at night but could enjoy their garden also at night.

WESCHLER: And this was done merely by the light strip at the top?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. He introduced that for the first time in 1933 in his own house.

WESCHLER: I've been having that problem at my apartment, I will have to see what I can do. [laughter] Anyway, do you want to just finish? We kind of left the story of Brown house in midair; we should come back and finish that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Of the Brown house, yes. Right. Well, I will speak about it then, in 1937, when he works on it.

WESCHLER: Basically, at this point he just went back and talked?

DIONE NEUTRA: We had a lovely correspondence with Mary Beard. She wrote about her husband March 8 and October 19, after Neutra had visited her in New Milford. She wrote: "I can say that Charles is as dynamic as ever, just as forthright, just as embattled against Hearst and all his ilk as he was when you last saw

him. He seems never to stop and never to falter, and what no one else may be prepared to do, teachers and others declare Uncle Charlie will do. This applies to his St. Louis call for a United Teacher Front against red-baiters, et cetera."

WESCHLER: Was your friendship with the Beards an intimate one?

DIONE NEUTRA: Very much so. I have a big folder of letters we exchanged.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Charles Beard?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he had no hair on his head, he was very bald.

WESCHLER: Bald?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he was bald. And he and Mr. Neutra had always the most wonderful conversations together; they just sparked each other. And he loved to discuss things, and so it was always just wonderful when the two were together.

WESCHLER: He wasn't living here, was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, no, he was here, I think, for a semester at Caltech; then he went back, and we just wrote to each other.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And Mrs. Beard, you know, they both worked together, and she was kind of a motherly,

very warm personality, and her letters are just wonderful, and she took so much interest in our lives, and she was a great comfort to us. She writes:

My young people whose Neutra house is now being enjoyed by them are also growing in wisdom and adjustment to the universe. It must be a charming place in which to study, as William is now doing, and if Melba has a lovely baby there, their cup of joy should run over. My words ring gayer than my emotions during the long hours when I remember the world at large warrant, but enduring the world at large is made possible by knowing that there are human beings in it, with you and Richard Neutra at the top of the precious list.

WESCHLER: Having brought that up, can you talk a little bit about Neutra's and your vantage point of what was going on in Europe during this time?

DIONE NEUTRA: I should speak about this a little later, I think. But I would like to talk once more about the Emerson Junior High School, because this came about, because there was a lady on the board of education, and her name was Grete [Margarete] Clark. She's still living today. She came from East Prussia, and I write to my mother:

She's about fifty, has snow-white hair and a rosy beautiful face and is a very elegant lady. Her ideal is to make of the school board an unpolitical--[Let me see, what would that be: unpolitical--? Yes, "impartial"] group which cannot be bribed. As this board gives out \$150 million a year, you can imagine how many sharks are around who would like to get something. The brother of the mayor has tried to bribe her. All

other board members are against her, and every day she receives letters of threats, and telephone calls, so that she doesn't live anymore at home, because her husband works at night. She told us different examples of corruption which she discovered and which she's trying to avoid. And it was very interesting to hear her discussion. She battled for Mr. Neutra so that he would get that school: she really went to bat for him. And she was responsible that he got this commission.

WESCHLER: Amidst all sorts of sharks who would have rather not seen that school built.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: It's interesting to realize, in the whole building boom in Los Angeles, that for every set of buildings that was built, schools had to be built, too, so there must have been just a huge number of schools being built during those thirty years.

DIONE NEUTRA: Of course, of course. And he didn't get any schools before that, because his Corona Avenue school of 1935 deviated from all the standards laid down by the building division of the board of education.

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JULY 21, 1978

WESCHLER: We're more or less in the 1936-37 period right now.

DIONE NEUTRA: Nineteen thirty-six, still. I wrote to my mother in September 1936: "What's the matter with Richard? Why--" No, let me see:

Shall I write you once without thinking about you and Vaterli? I will try to analyse why we cannot enjoy life fully. Time--that's what it is. Time is missing. Time that Richard and I can enjoy each other. Time that I can play with the children or can read a book. Why do I not have time, although I have a young boy who is helping me in the household? Because I am spending six hours in the office every day. That's it. And what's the matter with Richard? Because every day, two to three clients call, they want to see him, and because he works during the day, they want to see him in the evenings or on Sundays. So that Richard, whose day starts at six a.m., with a two-hour rest period during the day, and the day goes until eleven at night, hardly has ever a free time or a free hour for himself, or for me, which makes him really-- He's unhappy. If he had every year one big commission like the school, we could afford to have good help in the office. But as this is not the case, we have to work so hard so that we and Pfisterer and a few other draftsmen can have an adequate life. We would have to have \$900,000 worth of jobs a year. And even if he built twenty small houses, we could not get enough money to have two good paid helpers besides Richard.

WESCHLER: Was there a time eventually when this evened out and there was more time, or did you just

describe pretty much your whole life in that letter?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: So the time never really arrived when there was a respite?

DIONE NEUTRA: June 1936:

We made a trip to San Francisco and stayed with a family Joseph. He is a painter, and she was a Jewish socialite who had taken a fancy to Neutra and always arranged a party for him. We also visited Mills College and were delighted to meet again Lyonel Feininger of the Blue Four who was teaching there at that time. We had contact with Caltech through Professor Epstein, a physicist who invited us to meet Einstein, and R.J.N. had a three-hour fascinating discussion with him.

WESCHLER: On what subject, do you remember?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Einstein had apparently something which he called an observer in his theory, and R.J.N. discussed with him a human observer, and Einstein became very much interested. There was also a correspondence, but that unfortunately burned when our house burned. We also became members of the Severance Club. Have you ever heard of the Severance Club?

WESCHLER: No, what is that?

DIONE NEUTRA: The Severance Club was a club that was started, I think, in 1905 and has been going strong ever since. They meet twice a month, and they have very interesting speakers. All interesting people who came to Los Angeles at that time were

invited to come to the Severance Club, and they would get a free dinner, then they would give a talk, and afterwards would be an hour's discussion where they would be challenged. And Charles Beard talked there, and Judge [Ben] Lindsey would talk there, and [Theodore] Dreiser would talk there, as I remember Upton Sinclair would talk there, and it was always very stimulating. They were mostly lawyers. And Paul Jordan-Smith, who was for many, many years at the Los Angeles Times, he always gave the annual lecture, and for many, many years he was a most stimulating and most amusing man. And John Anson Ford (who, by the way, just wrote me a very nice letter; he's now ninety-five years old), he also very often came. And, of course--

are the names of the two writers who write together?

WESCHLER: Will and Ariel Durant?

DIONE NEUTRA: The Durants were members of the Severance Club.

WESCHLER: This met weekly or monthly?

DIONE NEUTRA: Twice a month.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Twice a month. And Dr. Gerson, Percival Gerson, who was also one of the founders of the Hollywood Bowl, he was for thirty-five years the

president: he was always reelected. So, that was very interesting. I should also mention that we became befriended with the pianist Richard Buhlig, and with the first harpist of the philharmonic orchestra, Alfred Kastner, and with Professor Gomperz, from Vienna; he was teaching at USC and was a very fascinating man.

"In September the Landfair Apartments are nearly completed, but Mrs. Rabinovich, who gave a loan to her son, makes Neutra's life a hell, because she starts phoning at 7:00 a.m., comes to the office because the contractor is not finishing the building." And I will have to say more about that later on. That was one of the most horrible things for us.

WESCHLER: The building of the Landfair or her?

DIONE NEUTRA: The building of Landfair, and later on what happened then.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Now comes 1937. This year was filled with the planning for the John Nicholas Brown house on Fishers Island. As the Browns spent a few months in Tucson, Neutra had a chance to visit them. Now, I want to read from my yearly letter. Let me see: no, that's not necessary, because I already mentioned that.

I should mention that Mr. Neutra's depression

grew ever more, and it became finally so bad that we had to consult a psychologist. We were reading together H. G. Wells's autobiography, and what he writes in the introduction, H. G. Wells, absolutely mirrors Mr. Neutra's own life. And I quote:

I need freedom of mind. I want peace for work. I am distressed by immediate circumstances. My thoughts and work are encumbered by claims and vexations, and I cannot see any hope of release from them, and hope of a period of serene and beneficial activity before I am overtaken altogether by infirmity and death. I am in a phase of fatigue and of that discouragement which is a concomitant of fatigue. The petty things of tomorrow turn around in my wakeful brain, and I find it difficult to assemble my forces to confront this problem which paralyzes the proper use of myself.

That was exactly how Mr. Neutra felt.

WESCHLER: You say he went to a psychologist?

DIONE NEUTRA: He went to a psychologist.

WESCHLER: Do you remember the name of the psychologist?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't remember. [Dr. Jacobson]

WESCHLER: Was it here, in Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: It was here, in Los Angeles, yes.

WESCHLER: Did he go for several sessions?

DIONE NEUTRA: He went for quite awhile.

WESCHLER: Do you recall what the kinds of things they dealt with were?

DIONE NEUTRA: I only-- No, but I remember that I

was supposed to sing the same song for him every day. And I sang for him Brahms's "Feldeinsamkeit."

WESCHLER: And was it around this time that the chemical--that prescriptions began being given to help out?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think so.

WESCHLER: The psychologist was the person who prescribed them?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And to come back to the Browns, I say: "Wanted to start construction in the summer. The office force was very busy. The project became bigger and bigger, and Neutra worried about mounting costs. However, the Browns insisted that they must have ten bathrooms, as they employed seven servants."

And here I must tell a funny story. They wanted to have two bathtubs in their bathroom, and Mr. Neutra said, "Why do you want two bathtubs?" And Mrs. Brown said, "You know, when Mr. Brown takes a bath, he is so funny that I don't want to miss that, so we take a bath together." [laughter]

WESCHLER: How old were the Browns at this time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, they must have been about thirty-five or so. Neutra's main concern was to produce a set of plans and specifications and details that

would enable a distant contractor to build the house. He also was able to persuade them to use two of Buckminster Fuller's prefabricated bathrooms. I think that was the only time they were used.

There is also a funny story. Mr. Neutra overheard, while he was supervising the house later on, one of the grandsons tell the neighborhood boys, "Can you imagine my grandmother sitting in this prefabricated bathtub?" because she was a regular dowager, she was like an empress in her big house in Newport Beach.

WESCHLER: Did Neutra know Buckminster Fuller?

DIONE NEUTRA: They were befriended, yes.

WESCHLER: Under what circumstances--here or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, they met at a party where Mr. Neutra was designing this bus in 1931.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: [Kelvin] Vanderlip, who owned very much property in the Palos Verdes area, invited him for dinner in New York.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. And what did Neutra think of Buckminster Fuller?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he admired him very much. Meanwhile, the little house in Bakersfield and the Hofmann house in Hillsborough was completed and received a

second prize in the House Beautiful competition, while the little house in Palm Springs received a first prize. Neutra also designed a house in Brownsville, Texas, for a Pan American pilot. And thirty years later, when that pilot retired, he built an apartment house for a Dr. Schiff in San Francisco and the ticket office downtown for Wrigley. Five large projects fell through, although they were completely finished, because the costs were too high.

In the beginning of the year we started the Strathmore Apartments in Westwood together with a Mrs. Friedman. They collaborated together. They have a combined stairway, and we owned four of the apartments, and she owned four of the other apartments.

WESCHLER: When you were building the apartments, you were building them for yourselves?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we built this for ourselves.

WESCHLER: As an investment?

DIONE NEUTRA: As an investment.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: We had a horrible time on account of the Landfair Apartments. The owner sued the contractor and sued Neutra, and he had to testify in court. The preparation for it took weeks and was agonizing.

As Neutra predicted, the contract price for the Brown house became much too high. Brown asked him to design a smaller project. He spent two weeks with them, and many letters testify to an egg dance he had to perform.

In December, I finally persuaded him to take a three weeks' vacation in Mexico, where he met Diego Rivera and his wife [Frida Kahlo], as well as architect [James F.] O'Gorman. He wrote a very amusing letter describing his trip. Could I read that? Will there be time? Because I think it would be worthwhile?

WESCHLER: OK.

DIONE NEUTRA: "During takeoff, I could see my Dione. It was 3:30 a.m. The stars shone. Dione waved to me while the airplane taxied by, passed control."
(Now follows a beautiful description of his flight to Mexico City, where he arrived at 6:00 p.m.; that is nearly seventeen hours later. The flight from here to Mexico City was seventeen hours.) And now I read:

Passed control. Taxi through the crowded city streets in darkness and out into the country. The chauffeur seems to wonder why I insist to be driven to San Angel by nightfall. The streets become less and less illuminated. The taxi rolls on and on. I start wondering myself. Finally, we see houses again. We stop in a blind alley in front of a Carmelite cloister

out of the sixteenth century, the San Angel Inn. It is very unilluminated. I pass through a beautifully planted patio in search of a human being. I see a light. I see a young, black-haired señorita, who coolly looks me up and down. I inquire about getting a room. "No." I try to engage her in a conversation. She pronounces a monosyllable. I try to find out whether there is any other hotel in this place. She says abruptly, "No." For a fleeting moment the thought occurs to me to strangle her, but then I tell myself, I am a stranger here, and if I do strangle her, the police surely will take her side. I turn back, tell the chauffeur, "No room to be had." Then I see across the street the house of Diego Rivera, which I, of course, recognize from publications. I tell the chauffeur, "Wait." I try to find an entrance through the cactus stockade. Finally, a door. I fumble through the darkness underneath the house that is built à Le Corbusier, on concrete stilts. I bump into an old sombrero-covered peasant sitting there in the darkness. I try to tell him that I am looking for Diego Rivera while he in turn tries to explain to me that he is not in. I see a light in a modern-looking neighboring building that somehow seems to belong to this house. I think it might be the house of one O'Gorman, who designed Rivera's house. Find a way out of the cactus stockade and the entrance to the other house. Two barking and raving dogs attack the night visitor. A fat young Mexican girl saves my life. I haltingly try to tell her that I am looking for Mr. O'Gorman. She says, "No aqui." I give her my card. She goes into the house. Out comes a bald-headed young man who says that he knows my name but is not O'Gorman. "My name is Butterlin. Please come in. Excuse the mess. We are fixing a fireplace. Oh, what a pity that you have this trouble with getting a room. Let me telephone to the city so that you do not have to wander about." Introduced me to his wife: "This is Richard Neutra, you know." Although he is German, he speaks English, as his wife is an American. I suggest whether he could not telephone the cloister, because I cannot believe that these people do not have a room for me. I have read in books that no

nightly wanderer is denied a nightly lodging. Butterlin telephones. A long Spanish conversation ensues. Finally he says, "Yes. One has to be introduced." "What does this mean? Do you know these people?" "No, I don't." Well, well. We cross the street. "Excuse my slippers." "Oh, that's all right." We pass again, now in twos, through the iron gate. The chauffeur seems to wonder how I, a complete stranger, managed to get help in the darkness without being devoured by watchdogs. Butterlin starts a long Spanish conversation with the señorita. I understand that much that he tells her I am a world-famous architect and that it is an honor for any cloister to give me shelter. Now she's all smiles. I run outside to pay the taxi driver, get my baggage through the gate and beam. We ascend a stairway. We pass through a magnificent roof garden, through a large yard, descend over two stair treads into a large room, which is mine. I ask for the price with breakfast. Smilingly, she mentions a fantastically high sum. I stop beaming, and the idea takes hold of me, this time irresistably, to definitely strangle her. [laughter] But I realize that Butterlin would find this most disagreeable and decide to postpone this act until the next morning. Perhaps my nerves have been affected by the altitude, 9,000 feet above sea level. Who knows? We shall see. "Can I have supper here?" Butterlin says goodbye. I thank him from the bottom of my heart and tell him how privileged I feel that I can stay here. I enter a refectory with a deep open fireplace. At two tables, two silent eaters. I sink into a chair at the third table. A waiter approaches and with a supercilious face tells me, "This table is reserved." Instead of hitting him I dutifully arise. Another waiter comes and tells me to sit down again. With a mysterious swing of his elbow he gives me a menu where the meal prices are again unbelievably high. Broken and sighing, I order. The repast is marvelous. Nearly as good as at home with my Dione. Oh, my Dione is far away, I think regretfully. Perhaps two, three thousand kilometers, perhaps fifteen degrees of latitude. After the evening meal I wander through an obscure garden, bumping against concrete water basins, wander through the roof terraces, past the cloister bells. Up over the washbasin,

I find two faucets, but both give cold water. I catch myself. Am I a typical American who in foreign lands complains about the plumbing? No, I say to myself, I am a Viennese who nowhere, not even in Mexico, wants to be taken advantage of. If there is not hot water, OK. But why should the prices in a cloister be sky-high if they cannot provide hot water? That's the question. In the morning I have an excellent breakfast sitting in the shade of a banana tree in the patio. I set out to visit the little town of San Angel. It is Sunday morning. I face the main cathedral and start a sketch in the thin and clear morning air. Forthwith I am matched by a barefoot tramp, who looks like a Velázquez dwarf. He starts a conversation in this unknown language, but I understand the words acuarela ("watercolor"), pastel ("pastel"), and they surprise me; American tramps are usually not interested in art. He wants to know the cost of Mona Lisa crayons. I hazard a price of twenty pesos. I have a good audience. Meet other painters. I run through the extended cloistergarden. I stand with peasant lovers in front of the mummy coffins in the basement. Then I meet on the sunny street an immense colossus, Rivera, and soon after, his diminutive, black-haired wife. Soon thereafter, O'Gorman and wife, a blond-haired Russian with a lovely profile, from U.S.A., and a Frenchwoman from New York who continually interviewed Rivera during the walk to learn his political views. They drive me in their car through the endless metropolitan region, through Paseo de la Reforma, Avenida Juarez Madera. We eat. I see the piazza del duomo, old palazzi. Finally we drive to Guadalupe where thousands of Indians are on a pilgrimage for December the twelfth to observe the yearly Fiesta of the Holy Virgin. A wild melee between cathedral and hostelryes. On the way I see an excellent housing project, Aztec villages like a thousand years ago. Finally we reach the village of Teotihuacan, with fantastic pyramids encircled by granite snake-stones. Night falls already while we carefully climb higher and higher, not wanting to break our necks on the steep incline. Then a long drive back in the darkness. We had a good time together. The girls sing in two voices. The diminutive Mrs. Rivera lays her manicured hands

on my knee, or her elbow on my shoulder. I tell her that one would not do this in Argentina. We stop to see other palaces built in the seventeenth century quite wonderfully. But now I go to bed for the second time in this new country.

WESCHLER: What was he doing in Mexico at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Nothing. He was just enjoying himself.

WESCHLER: That was a vacation?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was a vacation.

WESCHLER: And that was a letter to you that--

DIONE NEUTRA: That was a letter to me.

WESCHLER: Did he generally write as much as that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, my whole book consists of these letters.

WESCHLER: Of his letters, right. And most of those letters have survived?

DIONE NEUTRA: They have.

WESCHLER: I see. Well, we should be beginning to wrap up today. This is getting fairly late, but--

DIONE NEUTRA: Let me see. To go back to the Browns, they eventually decided to go ahead with the first project after all. During all this time Neutra was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He also had a difficult time with moviemaker Albert Lewin, for whom he designed a house at the beach in Santa Monica.

WESCHLER: Maybe we can, without reference to the letters and so forth, just summarize the situation with Lewin and Brown, and also how it ended up with the Landfair Apartments.

There were various lawsuits and so forth? Let's take them one at a time.

DIONE NEUTRA: This comes then in 1938, and also the Lewin house comes in 1938.

WESCHLER: I see. Well, OK, maybe we can stop today and look toward how that ends up.

DIONE NEUTRA: All right.

WESCHLER: Very good. We covered a lot of material.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 3, 1978

WESCHLER: We've had a little break since our last session. You've been up in San Francisco. And before we get started, right off, what you were just telling me off tape I thought was very interesting: your own feelings going over these papers, what it's been like for you. You might repeat some of that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. In order to prepare myself for these sessions, I had to resort to my diaries, and I was so struck about Mr. Neutra's continuing feeling of unhappiness and pressure. I think probably the main reason for this was that he had not adequate help, because we had only these small jobs, and in one of my pages, I read that most clients did not pay 10 percent but only paid 6 percent at the end of the construction; that he simply didn't have the money to have adequate help, and so everything rested on him; and that put him under pressure, and he became sometimes very disagreeable and difficult to live with. And only during the many little trips which we took where he lectured in various cities were we really happy together. And sometimes I make a remark-- I mean, any normal being can cope with life, and if a situation is too much for him, he tries to find a way to change it. Apparently, this he was not able to do. I could not advise him to give up the

office, because, in reality, when he had interesting work, then he enjoyed it and liked it.

WESCHLER: Did this put tension in your relationship as well, or was it immaterial?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, in a way it did. But I was always conscious that, fundamentally, there was nothing wrong with us. And I felt so sorry for him that this wonderful, witty human being was so crushed through his daily living that he became completely changed. And that also made him very unhappy, because he just blossomed when he had the feeling that he made me happy; and that was one of the reasons that he enjoyed when I came with him during these lectures, because, you know, his audiences were so delighted with him. And whenever he had the seminar with students, they loved him and clustered around him, and so we lived really from one such occasion to the next. [laughter]

WESCHLER: I see. Well, today we're going to go from the thirties into the forties. You had mentioned that you had one thing you wanted to bring up from the last session that you remembered.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, because I found a letter from my mother, who warned us that we should have nothing to do with Max Reinhardt.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. She had a friend, a Mrs. Wassermann, widow of the famous author.

WESCHLER: Jakob Wassermann.

DIONE NEUTRA: Jakob Wassermann. And his widow was a tenant at my mother's house. And apparently, we had mentioned to her that Reinhardt was here and that Richard might do a theater for him. So she said that since his brother Edmund had died all--alle guten Geister--all the good fairies had left him, and that it was a world scandal that he had used up all the Jewish money which had been assembled in New York, and that he used up millions just for his own living. And she said, "Please, please, if he approaches you, don't do anything until you have a firm contract with him." And then later on, in a letter to my mother, I say, "Reinhardt asked Richard to make a sketch, coldly ignored it, and did not even have the courtesy to look at it." Isn't that interesting? [laughter]

WESCHLER: That's fascinating, and it brings up a whole set of issues that I wanted to ask you about today anyway, which is the whole issue of your relations with this huge émigré community that began to form here. I, for example, had no idea that you had any contact with Reinhardt. Do you happen to remember him at all?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't remember him at all.

WESCHLER: You just remember this one incident?

DIONE NEUTRA: I had completely forgotten about it until I read in order to prepare myself. Then I saw this notice.

WESCHLER: Well, looking ahead at some of the other people who arrived, perhaps we can talk about some of the others. In particular, for instance, Thomas Mann was here.

DIONE NEUTRA: Thomas Mann. I think-- Did I mention to you this incident where Mr. Neutra went to Vicki Baum's house?

WESCHLER: No, no, none of these incidents. So you tell me all your émigré stories now. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: You know I sang under Richard Lert. He was--

WESCHLER: --Vicki Baum's husband.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he was Vicki Baum's husband, and he was corepetiteur--does one say that?--for [Otto] Klemperer, and I sang in the chorus under Klemperer for two years.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and enjoyed it tremendously.

WESCHLER: Well, before we go any further, can you describe that a little bit. What was that like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, oh, it was just-- I was so impressed to see a man like Klemperer, who must have conducted the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven 500 times or 1,000 times, but every time he did it, you had the feeling that this was the first experience for him. It was just wonderful.

WESCHLER: Was he happy here in Los Angeles, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think he was. We always visited him after the concert, and I remember how he was completely drenched in perspiration. He received us in a big bathrobe. And

once I told him, I said, "I'm so sorry that I cannot sing in the Ninth Symphony, I have simply too much to do." And he said, "Mrs. Neutra, I make a bet with you you're going to be there." And in fact I was there. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Was he respected equal to his worth here in Los Angeles, do you think, or was he not?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I think so. I think that people appreciated him.

WESCHLER: What kind of audience-- Who was in the audiences at concerts? Were they primarily the émigrés or were they Los Angeles people?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think there were lots of Los Angeles [people], too. The real crunch with the émigrés came really only around 1940. I saw a notice in my diary that so many people-- Everybody was approached to give affidavits, and, of course, we had to help our-- Mr. Neutra's two brothers-- they came here, which was very difficult: they both didn't speak English, they were both over seventy. The patent lawyer became a watchmaker, and my brother-in-law, who was a famous psychiatrist in Vienna, he had such a difficult time here; but finally, in New York, he found much of his old clientele, and then he made enough money so that his widow now can live from what he earned at that time.

WESCHLER: Did you have to prepare the affidavits and so forth for them to come?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, to come.

WESCHLER: Were there any other relatives that you also got affidavits for?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, these were the only ones. No, and a niece, the daughter of the patent lawyer, she came here too.

WESCHLER: Did you have to support them when they were initially here?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we helped them at first.

WESCHLER: I see. Well, getting back to just the general issue of the émigrés, you started out telling us about Klemperer, and you then were going to Richard Lert--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes. So through Mr. Lert we were invited to Vicki Baum's, who gave a reception for Thomas Mann, who had just arrived. And Mr. Neutra very much enjoyed Thomas Mann's books. Especially the Joseph [and His] Brothers he read with greatest admiration--in English: he thought that the English translation was much better than the original.

WESCHLER: And his English was better?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, no.

WESCHLER: He was capable of reading that well that he didn't have to read the German to read it?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no--Mr. Neutra?

WESCHLER: Right.

NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: His English was by that time very good?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes. But to come back to Vicki Baum's party. So, my husband cornered Thomas Mann and talked to him for at least a half an hour, and finally Vicki Baum sent somebody and said, "For heaven's sake, get that Neutra off Thomas Mann's back. There are other people who want to talk to him, too." And we were never invited again.
[laughter]

WESCHLER: Do you remember what they were talking about, by any chance?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I was not present there.

WESCHLER: Did your husband want to build Mann's house?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he would have loved to build Thomas Mann's house. But my friend Mr. [J. R.] Davidson built it.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Was there any resentment at that, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, there was no resentment, but Mr. Neutra just felt sorry about it.

WESCHLER: And did you have any other-- Excuse me, I didn't hear you.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he would have loved to do it.

WESCHLER: Did you have any other contacts with Mann aside from that one meeting?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I think that was the only time. I think there was a very nice letter which he wrote him (I've forgotten

now on what occasion that was), but I had a book with all the famous letters by Einstein, Thomas Mann, and I forgot now who, but that all burned when our house burned.

WESCHLER: Oh.

NEUTRA: So that's all gone. And he met also [Arnold] Schoenberg.

WESCHLER: Can you describe that meeting?

NEUTRA: We did not at all recognize his greatness, I think. And his music was so far removed; you know, I'm a baroque person, so it was so far removed. The same thing with your grandfather [Ernst Toch]: I remember the first concert which he gave here, and we were very much impressed, as a pianist, how he played his compositions. And we were frequent guests in their house and always enjoyed it very much.

WESCHLER: But did your tastes not run to modernist music in general?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no.

WESCHLER: And that was true of your husband as well?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: It's striking that, his architecture [being] the very forefront of modernism in architecture, that he didn't like the music.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, but the modern music represents the disharmony in the whole life which surrounds us.

But I think Mr. Neutra's architecture is a harmonizer.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: At least that's the way I feel about it.

WESCHLER: Can you talk more about Schoenberg, and [Ernst] Toch, for that matter.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, you know, we did not see them too often. I remember that your grandfather accompanied me to a Mozart aria which I was singing. And we invited-- The Schoenbergs came once to my parents', who lived at that time in the Strathmore Apartments. But we did not see too much of them. My parents became very fond of Salka Viertel and also of the first Mrs. Reinhardt, Elsa Reinhardt, and they were very often together with them.

WESCHLER: But not you as much?

DIONE NEUTRA: Not us. Not us.

WESCHLER: Generally during this--

DIONE NEUTRA: Because we were so busy. We simply didn't have time.

WESCHLER: During this period, I was going to ask--I mean, my sense is that for many of the émigrés, they spent most of their time with each other even though they were busy.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes.

WESCHLER: During an average week, to what extent were you, for starters, speaking German, for instance, with other German-speaking people?

DIONE NEUTRA: You know, we did not particularly enjoy these immigrants. They were really two classes: some who just plunged right in, they became Fuller Brush men, and they tried to do things, and they took jobs as housemaids, and slowly, slowly they got out of it and established themselves; then others just always griped and told what a big house they had and how much money they had, so that this-- So it was--

WESCHLER: You mean, in the old country, how much they had?

DIONE NEUTRA: In the old country, how much they had, you know, and how they just pined to go back, and they just didn't like America, and they were very critical of it. And so we didn't particularly enjoy this whole atmosphere.

WESCHLER: Do you have any in particular who were of that second kind?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, Mrs. Bloch for instance, Mrs. Fred Bloch. Do you know her?

WESCHLER: I've heard.

DIONE NEUTRA: But--

WESCHLER: How about Mann and Schoenberg, for example? Were they--

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't-- You know, we didn't see them much.

WESCHLER: Right. Again, just briefly.

DIONE NEUTRA: I only remember one remark of Mrs. Schoenberg. She says she never-- She only goes to Robinson's department store, because that is the only one where she is not being

addressed as "dearie" by the salespersons. [laughter]

WESCHLER: That's very good. Do you remember any other stories about my grandparents, for that matter?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: Any particular evenings that you had there?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. And I didn't find anything in my diaries either. There was one thing which I thought was interesting in 1937. Have you ever heard of a Hugo Benioff?

WESCHLER: No.

DIONE NEUTRA: Hugo Benioff was connected with Caltech and the--you know, where [Charles] Richter was? How was that called?

WESCHLER: Seismography.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, seismology. But as a private person he invented instruments; for instance, he invented a violin and a cello and a viola. It was just a stick on which you could play, but the sound came electronically. The most magnificent sound: I've never played on a cello which gave such a marvelous sound. And you could increase it, you know. You could play the piano and then you could augment it so that it sounded like as if you were in Carnegie Hall. And I heard a whole concert of chamber music played on these instruments, and it was just wonderful. But I guess the whole thing died with him.

WESCHLER: There are now other electronic instruments, but it's not the same thing.

DIONE NEUTRA: And then we had a very interesting experience. Have you ever heard the color organ?

WESCHLER: No.

DIONE NEUTRA: Clavilux it's called. That was an overwhelming experience. There is a wonderful letter in my biography where Mr. Neutra describes his experience. We went to Pasadena Playhouse, and there was a screen and in front of it was this--it looked like an organ, and he played it like an organ, but instead of music came shapes. And some of these shapes were so humorous that the whole audience burst out laughing. And Mr. Neutra thought that this was a new art form which was far superior than painting, and he visualized that there would be in New York-- A big dome like a planetarium would be built, and people would lie in chairs and would look up at the ceiling, and they would see these marvelous shapes. Something similar is now happening with the laser.

WESCHLER: Laserium.

DIONE NEUTRA: Laserium. But this was much more beautiful than the Laserium.

WESCHLER: Really. Well, somebody who does the history of Laserium will have an antecedent here to refer back to.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Mr. Ericsson, I think, was the inventor; he was a Swedish man. But I don't know what ever happened to his invention. Probably all these things, unless the

inventor pushes it himself, then it dies with him.

WESCHLER: Let me ask a few more questions, as long as we're on the émigrés, about the general period from 1933 to 1940.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: To what extent were you riveted or involved in worrying about what was happening in Germany during that period?

DIONE NEUTRA: Not too much.

WESCHLER: Really.

DIONE NEUTRA: Not too much.

WESCHLER: Other émigrés I talked to talk about how they were completely concerned. Do you have a sense of why it was different?

DIONE NEUTRA: You see, we were not immigrants. I mean, we came 1923. We were Americans. And although we felt, of course, terribly sorry and very much perturbed by it, it really did not affect us, personally, because we had not too much contact with this whole group. You know, we--

WESCHLER: Did you have friends who you were anxious about that you were anxious to see get out?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we had some friends. Yes. My physician who was my pediatrician for my first son, Frank, he, in fact, tried very hard to get an affidavit through his relatives; but apparently it was too late, and when the Nazis came to pick him up, he jumped out of the window and

committed suicide. So we were very sorry to hear about that.

WESCHLER: But, in general, that was not on the forefront of your concerns during those late thirties, for instance.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no.

WESCHLER: Were there people who were trying to get you to do more about it?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: Was there an antifascist movement in Los Angeles, to some extent?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. I don't remember that. I remember only there was one big rally at the Hollywood Bowl where we really heard for the first time--there was, I think, a motion picture screen which gave figures of how many people were killed in the concentration camps and so on. That was really the first time that we heard about that.

WESCHLER: That's, for that matter, fairly late or after the war even.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think.

WESCHLER: In some cases, some people who were nominally Jewish became much more Jewish as a result of the Nazis coming to power.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes.

WESCHLER: Was there anything like that going on with your husband?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he was so overwhelmed through his, you know, trying to make a living, trying to keep his head above water, that I don't think that he was very aware of it.

WESCHLER: Would you say you were more aware of it than he was, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't see any remarks in my diaries about it.

WESCHLER: Politically, in terms of national politics, international politics, which of you was the person in the family that kept up?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, you know, I told you that I always marked his ballots. And we were very enthusiastic about Roosevelt. And I joined the League of Women Voters and became very much interested, for instance, in the Negro community. I think my youngest son, Raymond, was seven years old, and I read him a child's history of the United States. I told him how we treated the Indians when we came here, and through the League of Women Voters there was a big discussion about the restrictive covenant and so on. So he tried to find out about the Negroes, and suddenly he looked at me and said, "Mother! When I am president of the United States, I'm going to liberate the Indians and the Negroes."

WESCHLER: We can still wait for that, I hope. [laughter] It's very striking to me, in what you've just said, the way you said, "When we came here, what we did to the

Indians," because you were very much identifying yourselves as Americans--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: --at that time. I mean, considering that you personally didn't do anything to the Indians, in 1923, it's just striking how you have taken on that whole heritage as part of your American sensibility.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, I think we were very enthusiastic Americans.

WESCHLER: Talking about your youngest son makes me realize that we haven't really talked about the coming into the world of Dion, or Raymond, for that matter. Maybe we need to talk a little about the family.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I think I mentioned that Dion was born in 1926. We talked about that.

WESCHLER: But can you talk a little bit about the family during the thirties, what kind of part of your life that was?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was-- Raymond was born in 1939.

WESCHLER: So he hasn't come into the scene.

DIONE NEUTRA: No. And he was born--because we always waited-- We wanted another child, but I always waited until I could have a maid or could have some help, because I just simply couldn't visualize how I could manage a child. Once my husband told me, he said, "You know, this is how our life is, and I don't know when it's ever

going to get better; so if you want to have another child, you better decide." And I was very reluctant to get involved again, I just couldn't see myself. But then I finally thought maybe it would be nice. And it was a most wonderful decision, because Raymond turned out to be the most wonderful human being, from baby on until now. He didn't give us ever any sorrow or anything.

WESCHLER: To what extent were you involved in family issues during those years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, Mr. Neutra was-- We had discussions, which made us unhappy, about the rearing of the children. He felt that all the educational ideas which he had I opposed, because I had an inferiority feeling: I was afraid that I would not be able to carry them out. And so in order to live in peace with me, he would just abandon it. But he felt very frustrated. [laughter] That's what I've just read in my diary.

WESCHLER: What kinds of things did he want done that you didn't want to do?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, you know, we had this great difficulty with Frank, and I came back--

WESCHLER: What did happen with that? You haven't brought us up to date.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, well, there is wonderful material where he is writing down how we should educate him, how we should,

for instance, learn to measure a room and then put it on paper in order to learn arithmetic. You can read that in my letters. But he learned enough so that he then finally could go to school. He went to a special school, I think I mentioned that.

WESCHLER: Near here, as a matter of fact.

DIONE NEUTRA: Near here, yes.

WESCHLER: That was one of the reasons you chose to be in this neighborhood.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's the reason that we chose to live here, yes.

WESCHLER: Did he seem to adapt, all things considered?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, he adapted quite well. And Mr. Neutra made drawings, I think I mentioned that. But in the whole, he didn't have time to be a real father, as you would imagine. I think if he had 10 percent meals together with us that was much.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: My sister gave me a snack server that was a contraption with hot water and with an electric outlet and three pyrex inserts, and I just would put the dinner in there, keep it warm; and then we would eat at a regular time, I would put the children to bed, and then, when he had time, I would sit with him. But then it would make him nervous: you know how children are, they make noise and--

WESCHLER: But they were all here in the same house as his studio was? I mean, it was all in close proximity?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and that was very difficult during the time before we had the garden house. And after the garden house was built, that was then very much easier, because then the family life could unravel undisturbed downstairs, while up here he could have a quiet meeting with his clients.

WESCHLER: Can you talk a little bit about Dion's upbringing? He is going to eventually become an architect. Was that an early development with him or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, Mr. Neutra thought-- Dion learned to play the violin, and he really-- He played a major concerto by Mozart, he played the Mendelssohn concerto, so he played really quite well and was very enthusiastic about it.

Then he wanted to buy himself a new violin, and his father thought that this would be the occasion to introduce him to drafting. So we made a deal with the violin maker to say he would only sell him the violin if he would pay him \$7.50 a week or something to pay it off. And then Mr. Neutra paid Dion \$7.50 a week to work in the office all Saturday and Sunday morning.

WESCHLER: How old was he at this time roughly?

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess he was twelve. And he was a very reluctant dragon and was really very unhappy about it.

But Mr. Neutra was also unhappy about it, that he had to pay \$2,000 for violin lessons (which he had paid at that time), and had to pay Dion to learn drafting. But by the time he had paid off a \$350 violin, he had got over the worst hump, and he became a very good draftsman.

WESCHLER: Was it absolutely decided from early on in Richard's mind that he should become an architect?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. Never. He didn't think that he would have to be an architect, he just thought that this was a good discipline.

WESCHLER: Exposed.

DIONE NEUTRA: And if he had that he would always be able to get a job anywhere. But he didn't particularly think of him being an architect. —

WESCHLER: Was he surprised, then, that he did in fact become more and more interested in it?

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess he was. I guess he was. But Dion has the feeling that his father forced him. And later on-- reading my diaries--it was-- It became-- Although he was a very good draftsman, he had the typical adolescent attitude toward his father. When he [Richard Neutra] had, for instance, his first heart attack, he [Dion] was supposed to direct the office. I told him once, I said, "Dion," I said, "if I cannot

find something which your father wants, I only tell him about it when I am 100 percent sure that I cannot find it. So don't give him any problems which you could solve yourself." So that was-- It was always a very tenuous relationship.

WESCHLER: Intense, turbulent relationship.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, turbulent.

WESCHLER: We'll talk more about that as we get closer to that.

DIONE NEUTRA: When it comes, later.

WESCHLER: We might now return to some of the notes that you'd prepared for just generally the period after that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he entered a theater competition for Virginia and won a prize for that--for the Williamsburg Theater competition. And in the spring he flew to New York and had several lectures and supervised the Brown house. And I remember that for months, when a letter from the contractor came with questions, he would answer them right away, and then in the evening we would drive to the Burbank airport and we would mail the letters. And that would go on, oh, three times a week maybe. That was our evening occupation. [laughter] And a very painful experience was the construction of the Albert Lewin house.

WESCHLER: How so?

DIONE NEUTRA: We had about fifty conferences with the clients, mostly on Sundays, lasting four to eight hours,

because they could not visualize. And they turned out to be one of the most disagreeable and difficult clients we have had. Yes.

WESCHLER: How so? What were they doing?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, you see, being in the movies, you can just decide to make a set and then just tear it down. But on the working plans, you cannot do that, because it involves so many changes over again. And they--he had absolutely no imagination: he couldn't imagine how a thing would look. And then, also, in their whole behavior--I mean, in contrast to the John Nicholas Browns, who were wonderful clients--they gave him very much pain. And a very horrible time, oh, then in July-August, he was a juror for a poster competition for the Treasury Department in Washington. I came along, and we had a marvelous visit with our clients on Fishers Island. And then, after they had lived there for two months--

WESCHLER: This is the Browns?

DIONE NEUTRA: --the hurricane struck. You know, this awful hurricane which struck the East Coast in 1938, which was so strong that a whole ocean liner was taken out of the water and deposited on the other side of the railroad tracks. They sent Mr. Neutra a wire, and it took him two days to get from New York to Fishers Island, because everything was interrupted. And when he came there, it

looked like a snow landscape. The hurricane had ripped out of the house a fireplace, which went through two stories and deposited it at the end of the garden. And all the rock wool had blown out and was lying like snow around the house. But not one window was broken. But part of the roof had been blown away. And, of course, Mr. Brown tried to blame Mr. Neutra, he tried to blame the contractor. But, I mean, such a force could not be anticipated.

WESCHLER: Did that lead to hard feelings down the line?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, for a little while. But then, afterwards, everything was all right again, and the house was repaired. And I think they lived for many, many years very happily in this house. And they finally, when all the children had grown up, they sold it. Oh, did I tell the funny story about the Buckminster Fuller bathroom? Yes, I know I did!

WESCHLER: No, I don't think so.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, you know we had these prefabricated bathrooms in the house, two of them, as guest bathrooms. And he heard once how one of the Brown boys said to one of his friends, "Can you imagine my grandmother sitting in that bathtub?" Because Mrs. Brown, Sr., was like a dowager. She was a queen. And this bathroom was very small and not luxurious like a guest bathroom would be. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Well. We move on, leaving her in the bathtub.

DIONE NEUTRA: He stayed east for three weeks then, and he

was nominated to be a consultant for the U.S. Housing Authority for California. And then he received a telegram to rush home and design in two days an auditorium for the Emerson Junior High School. And he was commissioned to design the deGraaf House in Portland, Oregon. He received an honorable mention for the design of an art center for Wheaton College. He won again a first prize in the House Beautiful competition and a second prize in the Ladies Home Journal [small house] Competition. And Shelter magazine published a large, whole issue about him, about his Rush City sketches. But the biggest personal event was the arrival of my parents in mid-February.

WESCHLER: Nineteen thirty-nine, now.

DIONE NEUTRA: That was then 1938.

WESCHLER: Thirty-eight? They came because they were fleeing Europe at that point, or just to visit?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, no. They came because we wanted them to come for a long time, but my mother had to sell a boarding house which she had. But they finally came, and we were able to get their furniture out of storage. My mother has moved, in fifty years of marriage, thirty-seven times. And my husband said wouldn't it be wonderful if once she could just move into an apartment. So as the lower apartment in the Strathmore was vacant, we furnished that. And my sister and I, we made lunch and dinner and put it in the refrigerator. When my parents arrived, they

arrived in San Pedro, my mother said, "Do we go to your house?" And I said, "Oh, I wanted to show you Richard's apartment house." And she said, "Oh let's go to your house first." And I said, "Oh, it's right on the way; in fact it's right here." So we opened the door--

WESCHLER: From San Pedro to Westwood is right here?

[laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. She opened the door, and she said, "Why, here's my carpet. Here's Vaterli's piano. Is this where we're going to stay?" And I said, "Yes, this is where you're going to stay." And then that day we were their guests. We never went to my house. And she wrote to a friend, and said, "If you think of us, think of us like living in paradise, but not in a tiresome paradise where you sit on golden chairs, but in a beautiful airy apartment where you see the branches of trees moving around you." And they were very happy here.

WESCHLER: How long did they stay?

DIONE NEUTRA: For twenty years. They lived here for twenty years.

WESCHLER: When they initially came, had they intended to come for good at that point?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: They both became American citizens and voted

enthusiastically for Roosevelt and for--oh, what was this wonderful man, who later became U.N. ambassador?

WESCHLER: [Adlai] Stevenson.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Stevenson--even shook hands with my father during his campaign.

WESCHLER: Did the passionate relationship between your husband and your mother continue?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. That continued up to the end. And I have some very wonderful letters which he wrote her during his trips when he was away, and for birthdays.

WESCHLER: A general question, moving away from family things, that I wanted to ask you--in fact, you had indicated that you wanted to talk about it at one point--what was the routine that he went through when a new client came to him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: And we've talked about several clients here, and I thought it might be a good idea just to explore that, in principle.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. At this moment, I think I just want to read a very short quote from my diary.

WESCHLER: Just looking at your diary now--this is the first I see--and these are handwritten in notebook form?

DIONE NEUTRA: At that time, for a long time, and still German. And I said, "Richard spoke very interestingly about his relationship to his clients, that it was necessary for

him to be in love with them and to weave a kind of legend around them, which was absolutely not realistic, but which made it possible for him to spend so much time on their individual project." And, of course, very often he was very disappointed. But maybe I should say how such a client meeting was.

WESCHLER: Right.

DIONE NEUTRA: Let's say somebody would telephone. They had seen a publication, and they said, "We would like a small house. We haven't decided yet who our architect would be, but would it be possible to talk to you?" And usually such meetings were in the evening, because then there would not be so many telephone interruptions.

They would come, and Mr. Neutra would try to talk to them maybe for two, three hours, try to find out what their project was, try to find out why they wanted to build a new house, what they didn't like about their old house, how they visualized their living, and he would ask them to write down what they did from Monday morning to Sunday evening. "You, Mr. Miller, and you, Mrs. Miller, and don't look over each other's shoulders." [laughter] Then at the end of the evening he would say, "Do you think that you have enough confidence in me that you would like to entrust your house design to me?" Well, in many cases they would be very enthusiastic and they would say yes; and then they would discuss a contract, and then they would sign

the contract. Then he would ask them to send him a contour map. After they had signed the contract they would leave the contour map. Then the next day, he would go on the land, and he would look at it in the daytime, and then he would go another time and look at it at night. And then they would send him this outline of their lives. Then he would start working on the plans and then make a color sketch, which would be about that big.

WESCHLER: You're saying, two and a half feet by two and a half feet roughly?

DIONE NEUTRA: Something like that. And a color sketch from the street front and from the garden front and also a color sketch of the floor plan with all the built-in furniture, because I think he was one of the first architects to build in furniture; because most of the houses were so small that he tried to utilize every corner so that there would not be one dead corner, and have a free space in the middle of the room. For eight years I sat in on all these client discussions, and everything was written down, and then at the end of the evening I would read it back to them and to be sure that we had incorporated everything that they wanted.

WESCHLER: You were like the secretary of this situation? You were taking notes on everything.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I was taking notes. Not right away, but later on, a few years later, it was very, very important

to be very attentive at the special moment, and that was usually at the second meeting. At the first meeting he made a kind of an exhibition: he put all these mounts--all the sketches which he had made were mounted, but only the final sketch which he thought was the best would be colored. And then, I would say, in 80 percent of the cases the people were absolutely overwhelmed. They say, "Why, this is like a dream. I mean, how is it possible--you've only seen us once--how is it possible that you were able to guess what we liked?" And so on. That was really wonderful. Then he would see who could read a plan. Let's say the husband could read a plan, and he would explain it to his wife. Then he made the wife explain it back to the husband, so he would be sure that they understood it. And then he said, "Now, you take it home. Think about it. Because I can make as many changes as you like during the preliminary stages, but once we start with working plans, then changes become expensive; so you'd better be sure that you know what you want."

Then they would come to the second meeting, and they would say, "Well, Mr. Neutra, we have been thinking about it, but I think the bedroom has to be larger," or, "the living room has to be larger," or something. And now came the point where he looked at me, and I had to write down: "Of course, you have to be happy in your house, and if

you want to have a bigger house, I will do so. But you must realize that this will cost more money." Because later on it was 100 percent the same thing: the people would say, "But we told you we don't want to spend more than \$5,000, and now the house costs \$7,000." They had completely forgotten that they wanted to have a bigger living room, that they wanted to have a bigger bedroom, and they wanted to have this and that and the third thing. And then Mr. Neutra asked them to sign this sheet of notes at the end, when they left so that later on, when this question came up, we could say, "But you remember in our discussion on such and such a date I warned you that this would cost you more money."

WESCHLER: You had a symbolic look that you would give each other when that condition would arise each time?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: It happened so often?

DIONE NEUTRA: It always happened again. The most amazing thing. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Generally, how did it work, then, with clients?

DIONE NEUTRA: He had really an inspirational quality about him. Did I tell you the story about the doctor? How he looked at his work?

WESCHLER: I don't think so.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he told me once, he said, "You know, I look at my profession like a physician, like that of a

physician": if you come to a physician, and he asks you for your symptoms, the symptoms of your illness, and you think you have told him everything that bothers you, and he suddenly looks at you--now I will pick out something out of the thin air--and he says, "Mrs. Neutra, when you wake up in the morning do you have a slight crick in your left little finger?" And you look at him in blank amazement and say, "Yes, I do." Well, that belonged to the syndrome of the whole sickness which I had--but I had not mentioned it to him; but from that time on I had the feeling that that's my doctor. He understands me. He's going to help me. And so he felt it was with an architect. If the clients come to him and they tell him all their requirements, and after observing them for a while and talking to them he feels that they would enjoy a special feature particularly which they had not mentioned to him, they also get the feeling that this is my architect. And I think I told you that during the many, many lectures which he gave all over the world, people would say, "Oh, you have good clients. They let you build such beautiful buildings." But he would always say, "No, I have exactly the same clients as you have. But I earn their confidence, and once I've earned their confidence, I become a magician." And that's how it was.

WESCHLER: Did he also feel that he was educating them as

he went along?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, one of the reasons that he started to write his book Survival Through Design was that he felt that an architect must have some kind of a platform where he could explain or defend a design--

WESCHLER: Go ahead.

DIONE NEUTRA: --because, after all, it's the client's money. If he wants something, how can the architect say, "No, I'm not going to give it to you"? But if they have some unreasonable requests, where he feels that this would make them unhappy if he would do it-- For instance, some clients would come to him and they would like to have a kitchen that opened into the living room, because the housewife wanted to be part of the party, and he would find out that the husband--or even she herself--was very sensitive to smells. He would say, "You know, you would be very unhappy in such a house if I give you such a kitchen." They'd never thought of that. They had just thought it was a nice idea and the color photograph looked so beautiful. And he said, "Well, you know this color photograph doesn't smell." [laughter]

WESCHLER: He hadn't yet invented such a thing.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that's right.

WESCHLER: Let me just turn over the tape here.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 3, 1978

WESCHLER: We were just talking in general about clients and so forth. Were there occasions when, for example, a client would come and say, "You know, I just like this old furniture; its sentimental value to me is old," and Mr. Neutra would have very strong feelings about different kinds of furniture, for example, but a client would just want this old stodgy furniture. What would happen in a situation like that?

DIONE NEUTRA: I have a nice story about that. A young couple came, and they had inherited Aunt Susie's double-decker-- No, you know, a bed with a baldachin--how do you call that?

WESCHLER: Uh, bunk bed?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not a bunk bed--with a ceiling over it--

WESCHLER: Oh, a canopy.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, a canopy. A canopy bed. And Mr. Neutra didn't say anything about it. I just see him sitting there with his closed eyes, and he said, "Now, let me see. In order to accommodate this bed, I would have to make the room two feet bigger in each dimension, and if I translate that into the whole volume of the house, that might cost maybe \$500. For \$500 you could have a sliding door into the garden, you could have air conditioning. Why

don't you discuss it among yourselves whether you think that this bed is so important to you." [laughter] After two weeks they called and said they had sold the bed.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: But he never said no, because he really wanted to make his clients happy. And if they had a beautiful old piece, he would design-- He'd explain to them, he said, "You see, all these old pieces were designed for very large rooms and very high rooms. In order to accommodate them with the amount of money which you have, we would have to make this room taller for this particular piece of furniture. But if your heart hangs on it, I will try to digest it, and I can do that, and then play it up in the whole design of the room."

WESCHLER: Were there ever cases where clients, after the building was finished and so forth, would start bringing introductions into it, into their homes, that grated against him? And what would happen in situations like that?

DIONE NEUTRA: He would accept the situation, because he wanted them to be satisfied. If that was what made them happy, then, after all, he could only provide a shell for them. But there were clients who liked modern furniture and let him design not only the interior but also the garden, so it became a whole concept. Like, for instance,

later on, in the Tremaine house, I remember that she discussed an interior decorator, and she told me afterwards, "Mr. Neutra," she said, "you looked so crestfallen and so unhappy that I told my husband, I said, 'Well, let's see what he does; if I don't like it, I can always throw it out.'" [laughter]

WESCHLER: I see. But did he ever try to change--try and convince someone to remove articles of furniture or gardening or something that they had put in? Was he difficult about that at all?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't remember any instance.

WESCHLER: He just swallowed it.

DIONE NEUTRA: He just swallowed it.

WESCHLER: I should think an architect is always being made sad by that kind of thing.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes. He enjoyed very much visiting after a few years. He always visited at intervals. I would say with 80 percent of our clients they became our friends, and I could just call them up and say could we spend a weekend with you, and there was always a beautiful guest room, much better than any hotel.

WESCHLER: You'd designed it yourself. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: Right, ourselves. So, for instance, there were some clients in Rancho Santa Fe, where we built two houses, where we'd very often spend wonderful weekends, and also with the Tremaines and a few times with the

Kaufmanns. Although I just read now that apparently they had some very disagreeable financial discussions at the end of the house construction.

WESCHLER: Really? Of the Kaufmann house?

DIONE NEUTRA: The Kaufmann house, yes, which was very painful.

WESCHLER: Well, let's get to that in a second and perhaps move forward from this general discussion. We've been talking about individual commissions and honors and so forth. I noticed that toward the end of the thirties and the beginning of the forties he began to do more and more low-income housing projects.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I wrote down here that in 19-- Let's see, we are still-- Yes. In order to attract clients-- 1939--RJN invented a very interesting tray. It was a metal tray with six inserts, and that was a dessert tray: I could put on a cup and a cake and a fork, so you could keep that in one hand and shake hands with another one, which you can never do if you have two plates. And then he had a drawer which you could open from the kitchen, and he invented, long before the airlines started with their trays, he invented a tray with inserts. And I would put these trays in a big drawer which I could open from the kitchen, and I would take them out in the living room. Everybody was surprised to get a whole tray

with the food on it. And so we used to have lots of parties in order to attract clients, but I don't think that we ever got anything through that whole effort, ever got one client. All the clients came through publications, I would say.

WESCHLER: Generally--coming back to this issue of low-income housing in general--I know that he had worked on Rush City as a plan, how is it that he began to do more and more large-scale things, 600 units, things like that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, that came much later, because he became a consultant to the [U.S.] Housing Authority.

WESCHLER: At what point did that happen?

DIONE NEUTRA: That happened--

WESCHLER: That's still a ways up.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's still a ways up.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: I wanted--

WESCHLER: Why don't you go on with your chronology.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, OK. In 1940 Luise Rainer became a tenant in the Strathmore Apartments, and we became very befriended with her. And here is an interesting remark I make about that. You know she was married to Clifford Odets, and I say that the marriage is very stormy, and they leave each other and come again together. He gets \$40,000 for a play, but it should not have anything to do

with politics. He looks at his job only how much money it will bring and how quickly he will become independent. And she is absolutely beside herself, because she thinks that the film, that a movie has a possibility to do good. And so she is terribly angry about the materialism of her husband. And he is terribly wrought up about her impossible idealism. [laughter]

WESCHLER: So they were in the Strathmore Apartments, and you got to witness that on a regular basis.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And we tried to pacify them. [laughter] Let me see. Nineteen thirty-nine was a very important year, because on March 12 Raymond was born. As I already mentioned--

WESCHLER: You talked about him.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I also mentioned that Neutra designed this garden house for me so I would have more room. On February 24, he received a letter from the American National Theater that he won a special prize for the theater in Williamsburg. And he was still very depressed during 1939, and in the spring he was asked to come to New York as a juror on a competition, and while there, the French consul gave him a medal from the French government for the best small-house designs in California. And while he was in Washington he was commissioned to be a consultant for the National Youth Administration, and subsequently did very

interesting work for them in California. He took some young people, and they worked several hours a week, and he would make a design--he would teach them how to make a design, and then they would build it. For instance, he built some buildings in Cal Poly San Luis Obispo which were, up until-- A few years ago they were torn down, but it became the architectural school. And they also built some buildings in Sacramento. And later on--but that comes later. And for the U.S. Housing Authority he worked on two projects, Hacienda [Village] and Pueblo del Rio, here in Los Angeles, but he had to work with some very conventional architects who were only interested to make money. And so he had a very difficult [time] with them.

WESCHLER: In general, how did these contacts arise? We have a sense of how clients came, how did the government become interested in him, just through his reputation, or were there enlightened people?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, because he went to Washington, he gave lectures there, and he visited the various departments.

WESCHLER: Did he find that there were some enlightened people in the government bureaucracy at that time who were receptive to his ideas? Or did he have to fight the government people?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, for instance, the head of the National Youth Administration, David Williams, who was a very well known architect in Louisiana, he became very interested

in him. And--let me see--and the National Youth Administration was so impressed with the work that he had done with the students in California that he was asked to tour Texas and advise them there. And in my yearly letter I describe-- He also at that time was invited to spend a week at--how is it called?

WESCHLER: Amityville?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, Texas--at a big college in Texas--
M&T or T&M? M&A?

WESCHLER: Texas A&M.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Texas A&M. And the students discovered that I knew very much about architecture, so they cornered me, and I had to give them a lecture how a wife can help her husband. [laughter] And I even sang--I even made a ditty on a Swiss melody about Texas A&M which must be still there in their files. And they were very enthusiastic about him, and these were the high points, because I so much enjoyed seeing him in action and--

WESCHLER: Were your children with you during those trips?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, no. Never. They lived with my parents. That was wonderful: I could leave them with my mother.

WESCHLER: It's interesting that during the next several years he did a whole series of projects in Texas.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. But that came later.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: He lectured in that year also at the university [in] Albuquerque. We visited Taos and spent a night with Frieda Lawrence, which I describe in my yearly letter.

That was the wife of--

WESCHLER: --D. H. Lawrence.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And I saw the room in which he worked, and with all his old hats and whatever--his typewriter.

And so that was a very interesting visit.

Although Neutra's name was inscribed in the New York Hall of Fame, we had very little architectural work, and we had to dismiss his most faithful collaborator, Peter Pfisterer. He recommended him to the NYA in Washington, and there he did such excellent work that they wrote Mr. Neutra that now they did not need him anymore as a consultant, which made him very sad.

WESCHLER: You can't win. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: In that year he also completed the Kahn house in San Francisco.

WESCHLER: On a house like that that was done up in San Francisco, would he go up to San Francisco regularly--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, because--

WESCHLER: --while it was being done?

DIONE NEUTRA: He then also [was appointed by] Governor [Culbert L.] Olson a member of the Board of Architectural Examiners and also of the State Planning Board, so that meant that every month he would have to go to Sacramento.

And he would take--at that time the buses had sleeping berths--so he would take a berth and take a night coach up to Sacramento. And then he would visit San Francisco, and he had this office there with Otto Winkler, who did all the working drawings. And we were very befriended with the family Sidney Joseph. He was a painter, and she was a Jewish socialite. And probably, if we would have moved to San Francisco, he would have had much better luck in getting--in finding clients.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: But, of course, we had built this house here.

WESCHLER: Why do you say that about San Francisco?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because through Mrs. Joseph we met a lot of people. And, after all, he built fourteen houses in the San Francisco [area].

WESCHLER: Without even living there?

DIONE NEUTRA: Without even living there. So if he had been there and would have cultivated-- If he had had a house there, our whole life might have been changed.

WESCHLER: Do you think that people generally had a more favorable attitude toward modernist architecture in San Francisco?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think they were maybe more sophisticated--

WESCHLER: Cosmopolitan?

DIONE NEUTRA: Cosmopolitan, people in San Francisco.

WESCHLER: Was there any time when you actually thought you might move?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, never. No. He in 19--let's see-- We made a trip to the East in New York and had ten wonderful days as guests of Charles and Mary Beard in New Milford, while Neutra worked on sketches for a Goucher College competition. And we also visited Williamsburg, because Neutra was asked to design a theater for it. I was taken along on a trip to Florida with Dave Williams, a Louisiana architect, and Karl Karsten, who had introduced Neutra to Colonel Westbrook when he lectured to the federal architects in Washington. And we drove through North and South Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, and Arkansas.

WESCHLER: Who was Colonel Westbrook?

DIONE NEUTRA: Colonel Westbrook was the man who commissioned him to do the Channel Heights project.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And also the Avion Village.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And that came through his lecturing.

WESCHLER: Can you describe this Colonel Westbrook?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was kind of a nondescript man, I wasn't particularly impressed with him. But he invited us to come down to Florida, and Mr. Neutra made designs for that. But that didn't materialize. And then we went to Texas with this Avion Village material.

WESCHLER: What position did Colonel Westbrook have?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he was the head of the Mutual Housing Authority.* And he then later on commissioned Mr. Neutra to do a design for Compton; but another agency had also a design for Compton, and that was just absolutely awful. The authorities in Compton wanted very much to have Mr. Neutra, but there was some political machinations, and we first thought the whole thing would drop. And then it was decided that it was going to be built in San Pedro, from a flat surface to a very hilly configuration with an eighty-foot canyon. So he had to adapt and change his whole design.

WESCHLER: The whole Channel Heights designs started out as a design for Compton. I didn't realize that.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: But this was again Colonel Westbrook who was the moving force.

DIONE NEUTRA: Colonel Westbrook was the moving force.

WESCHLER: Was it a military commission in any way?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, that was for shipbuilding workers.

WESCHLER: No, I mean, was Colonel Westbrook, his commission, was that a military commission? Or was it just that he was a military man in charge of a civilian commission?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And then also there's a funny story I remember now. Mr. Neutra was once at the

* Government publications list Westbrook as assistant administrator, Federal Emergency Relief Administration. We have not been able to confirm a Mutual Housing Authority, though the FERA did have a Housing Division at the time of Westbrook's involvement.--Ed.

Washington airport, and he noticed that a lady smiled at him all the time. And finally she came up to him and said, "Are you"--what was the Senator from Oregon?--[Wayne] Morse?

WESCHLER: Yes. That's an interesting--

DIONE NEUTRA: "Are you Senator Morse?" Because they looked very much alike.

WESCHLER: Yes, they do. I was going to say, I had never thought of it.

DIONE NEUTRA: Richard smiled, he said, "No, I'm so sorry. I'm Richard Neutra." "Oh," she said, "that's just as well. My husband is an architect, and he admires you very much." And through this relationship, he then later got some other housing designs, because this man was employed with the navy. He got several navy projects through him.

WESCHLER: Now that we're talking about all these housing projects, did he have any preference in terms of doing large-scale housing projects or doing small residential kinds?

DIONE NEUTRA: He loved small residences, because of the personal involvement. But he said, "I can even pierce the heart of a navy officer." [laughter] He always tried to find--when he got such a housing project--he always tried to find who was the person with whom he had to deal. And then he would charm them, so that they became personally

involved and personally interested.

WESCHLER: Did he have any particular idealism with regard to which it was more important generally to be doing: these large-scale projects or the small ones? Or did he not feel that especially?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. But he felt that because he had so much knowledge of individual clients that he then was able to use what he had learned in these larger projects where he did not know them, and would be able to design a house which would make also people happy whom he did not know because, he said, there was a common denominator. And this was our experience also in small-house designs. A house which was particularly designed for a particular family, when they sold it later on, other people were just as happy in it.

WESCHLER: Relatively speaking, was it more lucrative to do small houses or to do these big projects?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, of course, to do these big projects.

WESCHLER: And the government salary was good; it was always good to be on government projects?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, yes. That came later, that came then in the forties and fifties.

WESCHLER: Right. For example, on the Channel Heights project, just off the top of your head, do you have any idea, roughly, how much money he received for doing that?

Was it a salary?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. But it must have been enough money so that we could start making some savings.

WESCHLER: Which you did at around that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Which we did at around that time.

WESCHLER: I see. Were all these projects, in his mind, conceived as part of the war effort in general? Everybody was mobilizing in the war effort, and this perhaps was part of it also? Or was it really just a housing problem, as far as he was concerned?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. Yes. And I remember that, for instance, a big commission was going to come to look at it, so we brought all our furniture there and we furnished two apartments to show how it would look furnished, because his idea was that the housing authority should furnish the apartments, should have built-in furniture, because the rooms were small if people moved in with their own furniture. But it didn't work.

WESCHLER: But at one point you brought your own furniture over there?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And the [furniture in the] photographs which you see in the books is our own furniture.
[laughter]

WESCHLER: That's not, however, in the final version.

DIONE NEUTRA: And I remember, later on, how, when houses were photographed, we would bring all the shrubbery along:

we would plant the shrubbery, we would hold branches in order to complete his conception, and we would also bring furniture along and photograph the house as long as it was empty and not defiled by old furniture. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Generally--this is again a question about what happened afterwards: in many cases these low-income housing things deteriorated--in some cases, rather badly. What was his feeling about that as it would happen?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was very unhappy about that.

WESCHLER: Did he used to go to Channel Heights and look at it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was just crestfallen when he saw that. Fortunately, he didn't see the worst of it. You know, later on somebody bought it, and they painted it pink and completely destroyed it. There was a time when the tenants wanted to buy it, and they approached him. But this thing fell through, unfortunately. But then he might have saved something.

WESCHLER: Was this again a trial for him to see this happening?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Very much so.

WESCHLER: Did it tend to happen more often with those low-income housing projects than with the private houses?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Yes.

WESCHLER: Was that partly because he wasn't able to charm the 600 individual families?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: I see. Did he at any point lose his faith in that kind of project in general because of that?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he was always again hopeful that he could do something.

WESCHLER: Later on I'm going to want to talk in detail about the Elysian Park situation--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --because that was another case where he tried to-- Why don't you continue with your chronology.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. Let's see.

WESCHLER: Folks, we are just peeling through this. We're going pages at a time.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. "Nineteen forty-one, '42, design of the housing project for Avion Village, near Dallas, Texas. In 1942, start of Channel Heights." (I already mentioned that it was first designed on the level site.) And then in 1942, John Nesbitt, of radio fame (called "The Passing Parade") approached him, and he built a house for him, which he called the "last-of-an-era house," and it got the first prize in AIA competition; it became one of his famous houses.

WESCHLER: What do you mean, the "last-of-an-era" house?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because it was built in wood. And it would never have been built if it had rained, because there came

a new law prohibiting any new construction unless the foundation had been built. The same thing happened with Channel Heights: [it] would not have been built if the contractor had not moved his equipment and started to scratch the earth before any plans were drawn, because no building was permitted anymore, after a certain time--

WESCHLER: Uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: --unless the foundations were in.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And so the contractor just managed to get the foundations in, because it didn't rain, and then this house was built.

WESCHLER: I see. In terms of the Nesbitt house, it may be the last of an era, but it's also the first of a series of houses of Neutra's, I believe, in wood--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --where he began to use wood and some more natural--

DIONE NEUTRA: --materials.

WESCHLER: --materials. Why was it that he shifted to that in those years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because the clients wanted it. They probably had seen it, had seen it published, and this attracted them, and then that was the result.

WESCHLER: It wasn't so much his own taste turned toward

that direction?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No.

WESCHLER: Was it the scarcity of metal also during the war?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it probably was.

WESCHLER: It seemed somehow, in looking at the photographs, to bring out a romantic side of his personality. Would you agree with that, that there was a bit more romanticism in those buildings?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, maybe.

WESCHLER: And if so, was there a corresponding change in him, a kind of more romantic approach to architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: He wrote a very interesting article for the Architectural Review, in London, "Impediments of Prefabrication." In his first books he was very much interested in prefabrication, and he really thought that this would have to be the future of architecture if you wanted to house the millions of people who were going to come up, and that individual expressions would disappear: that you could not have Le Corbusier and R. M. Schindler, that this was simply not in the cards. And I think probably in fifty years from now that would be the case.

WESCHLER: But, in any case, thirty years ago he was having second thoughts about that.

DIONE NEUTRA: After studying and living here, he said that the unions were so strong that they were the impediments

for prefabrication, because each union had certain prerogatives and would not allow [one] to do certain things.

WESCHLER: Whatever the impediments were, he seemed to delight in doing these individual houses as well.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. But most of them could be prefabricated.

WESCHLER: Like the Nesbitt house, for instance, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: Could be. Could be.

WESCHLER: Well, why don't you continue with your chronology.

DIONE NEUTRA: In 1942, Governor Olson appointed Neutra to become a member of the Board of Architectural Examiners (which I already mentioned). Made frequent trips to Sacramento. And I read to him quite a few biographies, like, for instance, one about Clarence Darrow and about Isaac Newton. He very much enjoyed when I read to him.

WESCHLER: That was throughout his life, or in that particular period?

DIONE NEUTRA: In that particular period, but throughout his life I read to him. I also wrote in my yearly report that in 1942 Neutra had already written thirty-two chapters of his most famous book, Survival Through Design, but it took him twelve years to find a publisher. That comes later. And 1943, he put his last finishing touches on

Channel Heights, and we worried about the future. Then there came a letter from Bennington College, no, a wire from Bennington College, whether he would be interested to become a guest lecturer. And I remember he was just driving off for a supervisory visit to Channel Heights and threw the telegram in my lap, saying: "Crazy idea. Why should I go to Bennington College? Teach in a girls college? Go away from California? Crazy idea. Think about it." Then he went away. And I took my typewriter and started to write down all the reasons why we shouldn't go.

WESCHLER: Why you should not, or why you should?

DIONE NEUTRA: Why we should not go. And then I wrote down all the reasons why we should go. And to my great surprise, the reasons why we should go were much greater than the reasons not to go. [laughter] And at the same time, we had a nibble, an inquiry, from Governor [Rexford Guy] Tugwell in Puerto Rico whether he would be interested to come down there and design hospitals and health centers and schools. So I thought-- First, my reason was this: if my mother would rent her apartment and move to Silver Lake and would take care of Frank and Dion, we would go to Bennington with our three-year-old Raymond; we would again be a small family and could enjoy this little boy. He [Richard] would have a chance to find out whether he liked to be a professor. He would finally have

time to finish his book Survival Through Design, and during the winter months, when Bennington College was closed, we could go to Puerto Rico and he could then design these things. Well, everything came out like that. It was the best decision we ever made. [laughter] We had the most wonderful and happy time.

He didn't particularly like to teach. His classes were Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, from two to six, and the rest of the time he had time to write.

WESCHLER: What was he teaching: history of architecture, or practice in architecture, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: The main thing which interested him to go there was that he felt that all these girls who came to Bennington College came from very well-to-do families. After they had done their child rearing, they might be sitting on library boards, they might be sitting on housing boards, they might be influential in their community. And if he could instill in them a feeling of the importance of architecture and the importance of the environment, then he thought that was worthwhile to spend his time with them.

WESCHLER: Did he have any commissions that ever resulted from some of these instillings that he did?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Later on, Bennington College became a very important center for modernist art--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --in the fifties and sixties. Was there any of that already there at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, there were quite a few, but I don't remember the names of the painters. We became befriended with Peter Drucker, and his little girl played with Raymond. And we became befriended with-- Oh, he was a very famous sociologist who later came to Washington, but I can't remember his name now. [George Lundberg]

WESCHLER: We can fill it in later on.

DIONE NEUTRA: We later on visited him in Seattle, and I think Mr. Neutra learned a lot from him. But I already mentioned how much of his education came through live people, whom he cornered and learned from. And our time in Puerto Rico, that was absolutely a wonderful life. [There are] lots and lots of letters and yearly letters where I describe this whole period and a visit to Monkey Island. We put Raymond in a school, because I could not imagine how--for three months in a Spanish-speaking country--how I could have a little three-year-old boy along. Mr. Neutra went on an exploratory visit in November, and when he came back he told me, he said, "I visited a Danish nursery man who has the most wonderful old house in a five-acre park. I tell you it is like paradise." So when we went down there, we were in a hotel, and we couldn't find an apartment and we couldn't find a house. And it was dusty, and he had

to hire forty people to help him design these hospitals, and it was so noisy in this hotel, and we were really quite desperate. Then he remembered this nursery man, and he called him up and he invited us for tea. While we were sitting in the garden having tea, we heard that his daughter had married. So we both looked at each other, and we thought, "Aha! There is an empty room in that house!" [laughter] So we doubled both our charms and were invited for dinner. And during dinner we told them of our plight, and they said they would help us look for one. Well, after two weeks they could see that it was impossible to find one, so I finally approached them, and I said, "Would you at all consider to take us in as boarders?" And the lady came from Philadelphia, and she was very reluctant. She said, "You know, my husband comes from the farm, and we eat much farm products which you may not like." So I told her, "There's one thing I can promise you: my parents have educated me to eat everything." And later on, when we left, she said, "You can tell your mother that was really true." Later on she wanted to come to California, get away from the island, and we bought then three lots for them a block away from us--I think five lots we bought for them. And when she died of cancer, he went back to Denmark and commissioned us to sell the lots for him. We sold the lots with the proviso that Mr. Neutra would design the houses. And that's the reason

that there are eight houses there.

WESCHLER: Right. Right. I see. What are their names?

DIONE NEUTRA: Holger Fog. And he became a recipient of my yearly letters, and he became ninety years old. I kept on writing him until very late.

WESCHLER: Were you in Puerto Rico once or several times?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, three times. Three times, three months.

WESCHLER: Three--always during the winter?

DIONE NEUTRA: Always in the winter. And in between Neutra had to find a substitute for his Bennington teaching, and he would have to go there also during the summer.

WESCHLER: I see. But otherwise you were back in California.

DIONE NEUTRA: Otherwise we were back in California.

WESCHLER: So it was only one year you were in Bennington for the whole semester or something.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we were twice.

WESCHLER: Twice, I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Spring and fall. He was there twice during the spring and the fall.

WESCHLER: I see. And you mentioned, just offhand, he had to find forty people to help him, so it was a huge project that he was supervising.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, it was a huge project, and he was absolutely devastated. I mean, I remember how we walked at Bennington, and he said, "I don't know anything about hospitals. How am I going to design a hospital?" But then he had to find

hospital consultants, and I have a remark in one of my letters to my parents where he said how delighted the people are with him and with the projects which he had made. But it was very, very difficult, because later on he had a new design director who didn't want him there; he wanted to have a Puerto Rican and not a Yankee consultant. So they didn't give him a car, he had no desk where he could sit down, but he just persevered, and Governor Tugwell was very helpful. (By the way, we were invited once when Mrs. Roosevelt was there on a visit, and I describe in one of my letters how terrible [it was] that she had to stand there in line and shake the hands of 500 people. I said, how much better it would have been if we stood around in a circle, and she would have told us--she had just come back from India--and she would have told us something about her adventures, and we would have gotten a feeling of her, which we didn't during that big party at all.)

WESCHLER: What were your impressions of Puerto Rico at that time generally?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, we thought it was a most beautiful island. Of course, terribly poor, but all these tree-lined streets with these red--I've forgotten the name of them--but wonderful red-blooming trees all over the island. And we lived in this old house, and there was a big

terrace with a roof over it, and we would have all our meals there; it was just delightful. Sometimes I would get up early at six o'clock and would fertilize vanilla beans. In Madagascar a little bee does it, but in Puerto Rico one had to do it by hand.

WESCHLER: So you were the little bee.

DIONE NEUTRA: I was a little bee. [laughter]

WESCHLER: So what were some of the other things that you were doing during those years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Then the other thing was--

WESCHLER: We're now in the midforties already here.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we are now already in the midforties. And in 1944 the State Department invited Mr. Neutra on a lecture tour, so we left for Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, and Montevideo. And that was our first introduction in how our State Department works. We were invited by the ambassadors, and we noticed very soon that our State Department was interested to bolster the businessmen who were there, the business interests; but any movement where people tried to pull themselves up by their bootstraps was considered communist. And for instance, especially in Peru there was [V́ctor Raúl] Haya de la Torre, who was very important at that time; we listened once for five hours to a talk which he gave.

WESCHLER: In Spanish?

DIONE NEUTRA: In Spanish. We learned Spanish while we were in Puerto Rico.

WESCHLER: I see. Were you both fluent in Spanish?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we both learned Spanish. But I was absolutely amazed how Mr. Neutra, in the shortest time, could converse with the students in Spanish, through his eight years of Latin probably.

WESCHLER: Continuing with this lecturing--

DIONE NEUTRA: And in Peru, for instance--what was the name?--Belaúnde Terry, who later on became president of Peru, was his interpreter. And I remember a delegation of students came to him, but maybe I don't tell that because that's the beginning of the introduction of my biography where I tell about that.

WESCHLER: I see, you do mention that. But you were mentioning just generally that you were surprised at the State Department.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think most of these ambassadors were political appointees, and they didn't speak the language of the country.

WESCHLER: Particularly in South America.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, in South America, that's right. And I had the feeling that this was just a cocktail circuit, this whole thing moved in a cocktail circuit. My husband was more informed in a week about that country--through

the architects who took him around and explained to him-- than the ambassador was. That was our impression. And when we came to Argentina, that was very interesting. That was the beginning of Perón. And there was the wife, the former wife, of a famous Mexican painter who painted a wall here in Olvera Street--

WESCHLER: I can give you several: Siqueiros, Rivera--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, Siqueiros. Siqueiros--Blanca Luz.

She was a poet, and we had met her while we were in Mexico.

She came to Mr. Neutra once at his hotel, and she said,

"Would you be interested to meet Perón?" Of course, all

our family were--the whole circle was against Perón. And

so Mr. Neutra said yes, he would be very much interested.

I came with him, but unfortunately they didn't let me in.

He went up to the apartment, and he had an hour's conversation

with Perón, and he was very much impressed. Perón showed

him some housing projects he was working on, and Mr. Neutra

was very much impressed with his social interest in

social reform. We never told our relatives about that

visit; it was a deep, dark secret.

WESCHLER: What did he think of him besides just his social interest?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was very much impressed with him.

WESCHLER: Just as a person.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, but I think that, you know, power corrupts,

and this is what happened to him. But I think at the beginning he had very many good ideas.

WESCHLER: So generally, this trip, among other things, was a very politicizing experience for you.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, very much so.

WESCHLER: You had a whole set of insights that you hadn't, and some of your naiveté about the world fell a little bit.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, absolutely. We felt that Jefferson's ideas were not being realized.

WESCHLER: I'm thinking ahead to, for example, the embassy plan for Pakistan much later on.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Do you think that that was in some way affected by his insights about how American embassies ran in these countries, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't think so.

WESCHLER: I see. Did he ever--

DIONE NEUTRA: He got that job purely through his visiting all these offices and charming the heads of these various departments in Washington.

WESCHLER: I see. OK, we'll continue with some of your other things. We have about five more minutes on this tape.

DIONE NEUTRA: I remember the first lecture which he gave there.

WESCHLER: Where is this?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was in Buenos Aires. The head of the architects association was his translator. And after every second sentence, he would say, "Would you mind repeating it once more?" It was absolutely awful. [laughter] Just terrible. Let me see. In 1946, you know, he started-- I have no notes for 1945, '46, '47, because my parents were here, Mr. Neutra was here, I didn't write any more letters to my family, and I wrote very little in my diary. I only know that in 1946 he designed the house for Edgar Kaufmann.

WESCHLER: I think that what we'll do is that we'll pause then.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: We finished off the war. Let me ask you this one question: I'm really struck in this whole cavalcade-- and we've talked about it a little bit--there'd be no way of knowing the war was going on, listening to your life. Did you have that sense, too, that you were just so busy that the war was--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I only remember that while we were driving through Texas, in 1939, you know, these long, long hours driving through this huge country to visit these various National Youth Administration projects, we would listen to the radio, and we would listen to Hitler invading France. And I remember how absolutely horrified we were

about it, and then Belgium and all these things. And I remember the fireside speeches of Roosevelt and--oh, yes, I think we were very much interested in what was happening.

WESCHLER: You were interested and involved. But also, at the same time, you were so busy doing other things that--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: Well, we will, I think, leave the war, coming to an end here--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --and pick up in a world of peace on the other side, perhaps.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: Very good.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 9, 1978

WESCHLER: You were just saying that from our last session you remember the name of the sociology professor at Bennington College.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I mentioned Peter Drucker, and I couldn't remember the name of George Lundberg. He was the president of the National Association of Sociologists.* And then from Bennington [he] went to the University of Washington. He was a very important man in his field, and he became a very good friend of ours whom we visited when we went to Seattle.

WESCHLER: OK. One other question I wanted to ask you: we just had lunch together and while we were eating--I don't know whether we talked about this on tape--but we were eating from trays that were rather special. And you, first of all, might describe the trays and then talk about the carpenter who worked with Mr. Neutra.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I think I describe the trays in our last tape. But there I talked mostly about his metal trays. I mentioned that Mr. Neutra made these trays with inserts for a large plate and for a small plate, and a hole for a glass, and a little tiny hole for a test tube in which he could put a little flower. [laughter]

* American Sociological Society

WESCHLER: That's the best thing of this is that little touch, the little Oriental touch of the flower.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: This was long before airplanes had this kind of trays.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And a carpenter by the name of Mr. Epping--I don't know his first name now--for many, many years helped to design any such items Mr. Neutra wanted to design. And he also helped him build the chairs which Mr. Neutra designed.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was the carpenter?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was a German, and he was an educated man and very willingly would come here and discuss for hours what or how best to do a thing. And Mr. Neutra was very fond of him.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Did he work with other architects also, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I think so. He had a carpentry shop.

WESCHLER: I see. OK. Well, let's return to the end of the war, which is where we were last time, or near the end of the war, and why don't we start with your chronology, and I'll interrupt you, as I always do.

DIONE NEUTRA. OK. I think I spoke about the trip to Peru. And I mentioned that I have no notes for 1946, and I do not remember how we met the Kaufmanns.

I have no idea how he approached Mr. Neutra, but I only remember that there was a law that you could not build any large buildings, there was a ban on large buildings. And again, like with the Nesbitt house, the foundations had to be poured before he had the plans ready; otherwise this building could never have been built.

WESCHLER: Why could you not build--

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't know, it must have been--

WESCHLER: Was it earthquake or something?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, no, no. It was after the war, maybe a shortage of materials; only small houses would be built.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. And how did the fact that he couldn't design the house before the foundation was poured, how did that affect the design?

DIONE NEUTRA: That affected the design in such a way that the house became much more expensive than the Kaufmanns wanted it to be. And Mr. Neutra was surprised that such a good businessman like Mr. [Edgar J.] Kaufmann, who had a department store in Pittsburgh, would settle on one contractor instead of having competitive bids. And so the house became, I think, five times as expensive as he wanted to have it built--but of course, also, because he enlarged, you know, his--

WESCHLER: Specifications?

DIONE NEUTRA: Specifications. I remember that he spent alone \$20,000 on the stone walls; all the stones were cut to fit exactly like they were in Peru. It was an Italian who was an artist in his field, and Mr. Kaufmann was very much interested in that. Mr. Neutra always felt that when he had a chance to design a large house, that he tried to dissuade his clients to use the money for chichi interior decorations but rather look at it, that it was helpful for the general development of housing. For instance, he proposed to make a circulating system in the floor because it gets so hot in Palm Springs. So that during the hot noon hour, ice water would circulate around the swimming pool, and at night it would switch over and hot water would circulate through the pipes. And that had never been tried before.

WESCHLER: That was the kind of expense that he would rather see.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's the kind of thing that he would rather see. And he also proposed for the first time movable louvers in the porch upstairs.

WESCHLER: These were electronic wing louvers?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, at that time they were not yet electronic.

WESCHLER: I see. Can you describe Mr. and Mrs. Kaufmann a little bit for us? This is also the Kaufmann who

commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to do Falling Water so this is a rather major figure in architecture.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And I think that his son was very disgruntled that he did not choose Frank Lloyd Wright to design his house, but chose Mr. Neutra. That's what we heard later.

WESCHLER: Why did he choose Neutra rather than Frank Lloyd Wright?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know.

WESCHLER: Was he satisfied with Falling Water?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he liked Falling Water but also liked Mr. Neutra's design very much. And Mrs. Kaufmann was a very elegant lady and he was a regular businessman; he had a special office where he had a machine where he could talk directly to his department store in Pittsburgh-- how do you call that?

WESCHLER: A special line? A tie line?

DIONE NEUTRA: Where he could send--

WESCHLER: A Telex machine?

DIONE NEUTRA: A Telex machine, one of the earliest Telex machines, I think.

WESCHLER: This was at the Desert House?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was at the Desert House. And we enjoyed very much our supervisory visits there, and he was artistically very much interested, so I think that

Mr. Neutra had a very good time talking with him.

WESCHLER: Do you have a sense of where that came from in him?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: Why would a businessman in Pittsburgh be interested in modern architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know. Then, later on, his wife died and he married his secretary. And then still later on, when he died, she developed multiple sclerosis, and apparently he left the house to her but not enough money to keep it up. So when she died, I think the house stood empty for seven years--

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, before other people bought it.

WESCHLER: Is it being preserved satisfactorily today?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, it's not. I think the grounds are beautiful, but I hear that the furniture inside is terrible, and I don't think that the people have any understanding of it.

WESCHLER: Was Kaufmann interested in modern developments in other areas besides architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, also modern paintings.

WESCHLER: At the house he had modern paintings?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think he had at the house; he had modern paintings at the house.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. And basically, you mentioned a small amount of conflict concerning price.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, later on, when the final bills came in and he was supposed to pay 10 percent of the architect's fee, I think there was quite some recriminations, and I think that the correspondence with Kaufmann from that time is at UCLA. So for a while we were not able to visit him, but later on, then, I think that passed, and we were invited to be their guests.

WESCHLER: During later years. Today that is seen as one of the major Neutra houses. Did he feel it was that important as he was doing it?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. When people asked him, "What is your major house?" he always said, "My whole oeuvre." He would never pinpoint. My favorite house is the Tremaine house, which came the next year.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Did he have any particular fondness, though, for the Kaufmann house?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, I think he-- Yes, he did.

WESCHLER: How does something like that develop, that that house, for example, is today thought of as a real Neutra house?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because Mr. [Julius] Shulman made some very stunning and beautiful photographs, and then Mr. Neutra made some very beautiful and stunning slides. He had a series of slides where he showed the house at noon with

the pool as a mirror and at noon with the pool during a storm or when there was no sun in the sky; and then the same house, the same view, at sunset; and then the same view at dusk; and then the same view at night. And there were always [gasps]; people just went like that when he showed these. And as he showed these slides all over the world, I mean, this just simply became his most famous house; that's how it developed.

WESCHLER: It was certainly one of the most photogenic houses perhaps.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Especially with that incredible background of the mountains and so forth.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That's right.

WESCHLER: Well, let's talk a little about the Tremaine house, then.

DIONE NEUTRA: In that case, it was Mr. Tremaine who was artistically very much interested. And we have had a most happy and satisfying relationship with them during the planning. There were some anxious moments, because suddenly Mr. Tremaine had the feeling that the house would become too expensive, so--

WESCHLER: Always a cause of anxiety.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right--so they cut out the second floor. And because the house was built in concrete

construction, on account of the fire hazard, and not in wood, and the piers were already in, so Mr. Neutra had to work around in order to put the master bedroom downstairs, and the children's rooms became smaller. So that was quite a problem for him. But the relationships to both of them were very good.

WESCHLER: Well, can you describe Mr. Tremaine? Who was he, for starters?

DIONE NEUTRA: Mr. Tremaine's father was the president of General Electric--

WESCHLER: OK.

DIONE NEUTRA: --and a convinced Republican. I remember that his father nearly cried when he heard that Roosevelt was elected for a third time. He thought it was absolutely catastrophic for this country. [laughter]

WESCHLER: And how had you gotten to know him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he called up one day; he had seen publications of Mr. Neutra's house, and he just told him he would like him to design a house for him.

WESCHLER: This was going to be in Ojai? Had the site already been chosen?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, in Santa Barbara--in Montecito.

WESCHLER: Had the site already been chosen?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, they had a beautiful five-acre wooded lot. And I think Mr. Neutra fitted it beautifully into the landscape.

WESCHLER: Absolutely. From the photographs, you really get a sense of that, in that case.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And I remember we would go up there, and we would usually spend a night at the Pierpont Inn, which was at that time a very sleepy place, and the freeway did not go in front of the restaurant. I thought that it was just awful when I came back there many years later and saw how this had been handled, because it was such a peaceful place. And they always invited us for lunch when we came there, to a country club, and then later on to their house. They had a butler and a maid. It was very elegant. And Mrs. Tremaine came from New Orleans, and when the time came for interior decoration, she apparently mentioned that they were going to employ an interior decorator. Later on, she said, "Mrs. Neutra, you made such a horrified face that I said to my husband, 'Well, let's see what Mr. Neutra can do. If I don't like it, I can always throw it out again.'" [laughter]

WESCHLER: You were very often present at these meetings.

DIONE NEUTRA: I was always present.

WESCHLER: Partly your role as secretary.

DIONE NEUTRA: I always drove Mr. Neutra.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh, I see. Could he drive?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, he could drive. But he would, you know, he would always be half an hour late or an hour

late for dinner, and then I would tell him, "Richard, we're late." And then he would start out fifty miles an hour and then he would tell me some interesting stories, and it would dwindle down and finally we were down to twenty-five miles. And I would say, "Richard, we're late," whoosh! off he went again. And so I finally told him "You know, I think I better drive." [laughter]

WESCHLER: I see. Can you give us a little more description of Mr. Tremaine? We know his father came from General Electric. What was his personality like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. He was a gentleman of leisure. He became very much interested in photography, and I had the feeling--and they played tennis, I don't know whether he played golf--but I had the feeling that this was just a cocktail circuit, you know: late breakfast, tennis, lunch at the club, and then cocktails, and in the evening, I think they would play bridge or something.

WESCHLER: What did you and Mr. Neutra think of that kind of life?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, we didn't want to have any part of it.

WESCHLER: I guess the thrust of my question is: an architect is confronted during his career with all sorts of styles of living and has to come in touch with extremely rich people, and then within a few years, Neutra was working on the Elysian Park project, which was an extremely poor slum area--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --Elysian Park.

DIONE NEUTRA: But he was really more socially minded. That's what I mentioned, that he always tried to see whether he could use-- The large houses which he built I think you can count on the fingers of your hand, because all the other houses are small houses. But he tried to see whether he could make some kind of experiment which would be useful also for smaller houses.

WESCHLER: Was there any element of feeling of disapproving of a person having that much money?

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: He did not have that kind of political--

DIONE NEUTRA: Not at all.

WESCHLER: --ax to grind.

DIONE NEUTRA: No. Mrs. Tremaine was a Democrat, and she was socially minded and, I think, supported progressive movements.

WESCHLER: I see. Was that a--

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: There was conflict in the family between them?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was, I think--yes. [laughter]

WESCHLER: In between tennis and cocktails you'd argue about that. I see. That also is again one of the major houses.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and I think also that that house, there

was still a ban on. And also, this house, the foundations had to be dug before it was too late. I mean, his major projects--the Channel Heights project, the Nesbitt house, the Kaufmann house, and Tremaine house--nearly didn't get built on account of these regulations. I think that's very interesting.

WESCHLER: What's also interesting to me, in a sense, is that in 1946 and '47, in the Kaufmann house and the Tremaine house, he seems to have reached some kind of peak of elegance and perfection in terms of his work. Those are considered to be two of his greatest houses.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Is there something about his outward life or something that was allowing that at that time? Or, how do you account for it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he was not so burdened down. He didn't have so much work at that time, so he had really more time to spend for himself.

WESCHLER: Is that with the end of the war, all of the commissions and so forth--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --began falling away? The Puerto Rico project was not as demanding and so forth.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: I see. OK, let's continue with your chronology for a while.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. In 1948 he was a juror for the Jefferson [Westward Expansion] Memorial Competition in St. Louis, and he handed [Eero] Saarinen a \$20,000 check. He won the first prize for this big arch.

WESCHLER: That was already thought of back then?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: It wasn't built until much later.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, much later. But that was very interesting, because he always felt that Saarinen had a special knack to understand how a jury works, because he won quite a few competitions. And while the park department had laid down the program and all the other competitors had all sorts of educational buildings, he simply made this arch, a Gateway to the West (or whatever it was).

WESCHLER: What was Saarinen like? Did you know him?

DIONE NEUTRA: I only met him a few times.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: He was befriended with [Charles] Eames. And Eames built a house for him--or, Saarinen built a house--how was that now? I think they built it together for [John] Entenza.

WESCHLER: Can we maybe step back a second and talk about this whole group of Los Angeles architects and people--Entenza and Eames, Craig Ellwood--we were just talking about, and Neutra's relationship with them. They are beginning

to percolate up to the surface at this time.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, are beginning to percolate. And Mr. Neutra would go and see a house somewhere, and it looked so much like a Neutra house, but he didn't build it! [laughter]

WESCHLER: Did he have relations with these younger architects himself, personally?

DIONE NEUTRA: Not very much. He simply didn't have time, because he just worked incessantly.

WESCHLER: How were Neutra ideas filtering to them then? Was it just that they were surrounded by them?

DIONE NEUTRA: It was through the publications. There were so many publications all over the world, and in newspapers and magazines, in books, and he felt very apprehensive, because all these men had more work than he had. And he said, "Why should anybody come to me?" But then we had one experience after another that clients would come, and Neutra would ask them, "Why did you come to me?" And they'd say, "Well, we saw this book of houses, and we looked through it, and every time we came to a house we liked and we'd look at the end, it was a Neutra house."

So apparently, it was the serenity of the buildings and-- Mr. Neutra always said that his houses are made up of details, and because he doesn't have any strange, crazy design ideas, everything fits and everything is thought-out, and this produces a general feeling of serenity. I think maybe at

this time I should read you something which I wrote down in my diary. Let me look, maybe I can just find it quickly.
[tape recorder turned off] This is June 1950, and I'm translating from the German (I still wrote in German).

I had an important discussion with Richard. He told me that only recently, and only in the last years or months, he became aware how solitary and isolated he is. Even I, whom he loves so much and whom he admires so much, do not know what motivates him, his work, what he has all to consider and what he all has to think about. What we call perfectionism is really the reason for his success. The unending care and patience which he squanders on every detail have brought him his success. And that is the reason that nobody can design for him: because nobody has the patience and the [Fingerspitzengefühl] fine feeling--

Can you say?

WESCHLER: Feeling or touch.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, "the touch and understanding for the smallest detail and how the whole composition accrues from that."

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Would you feel that the younger generation of architects in Los Angeles in particular did not have that kind of feel?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. I don't think so.

WESCHLER: How about John Entenza, in particular, he was-- We talked about publications a few seconds ago.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: He was a central figure in them.

DIONE NEUTRA: He was very, very instrumental that Mr. Neutra became better known.

WESCHLER: Who was Entenza, in terms of your life? How did you meet him and so forth?

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess he just approached Mr. Neutra and said that he saw, you know, a house published and whether he could publish it in Arts & Architecture. And then, any time Mr. Neutra had anything, I think he published nearly everything that Mr. Neutra designed at that time.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was Entenza?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was a tall man and very interested in art and very socially minded, and we are certainly very beholden to him.

WESCHLER: What was his background, do you have any idea?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know.

WESCHLER: Was he a frequent visitor as well as--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, socially, we did not see much of him, because whenever we had social life, it was always, you know, to try to invite people who wanted to build something or-- But to get together with friends, this is something, this was completely unknown to us. And that was the reason I started my yearly letters: because I was busy from 5:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. every day, except one day when I visited my parents. That was the day when I shopped. And then I had lunch with my friend Grete Davidson. I have a

great capacity for friendship, but there simply was no time for it.

WESCHLER: A great capacity with little occasion, I guess.

DIONE NEUTRA: Great capacity with little occasion, and that is the reason I kept up occasional friendships of people whom I met on our trips who then, through the years, developed into real friends.

WESCHLER: Entenza was responsible, I believe, for the Case Study [House] program.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Did Neutra have any houses in that series?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes.

WESCHLER: How did that work?

DIONE NEUTRA: The Bailey house on Chautauqua, near the Eames house.

WESCHLER: How did the Case Study work? How did that work, that program?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think it worked very well.

WESCHLER: I mean, what exactly was it?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, they tried to interest all sorts of manufacturers to participate, and then the house was built, and then--

WESCHLER: Using innovative techniques--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: --and materials.

DIONE NEUTRA: And then sold, then opened to the public.
That's how it worked.

WESCHLER: It was built without a particular client in
mind, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: I think, no, I think that the Baileys were
interested to have a Case Study House, because they were
willing to have the public come through there before
they moved in or something like that.

WESCHLER: I see. When, for example, the Baileys wanted
a Case Study House, did they approach Entenza, or did they
approach Neutra and say, "We would be willing to do it"?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember. That I don't
remember. Only that they were also very satisfied clients,
and later on they commissioned Mr. Neutra to design an
addition to their house, with a pool.

WESCHLER: And that time they didn't have to have people
come through and look at that? [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: How about some of the other people? Eames
has been mentioned a few times.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Eames lived for seven years in the
Strathmore Apartments.

WESCHLER: Really, I didn't realize that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and I have a beautiful letter from him
where he tells Mr. Neutra how happy he was living there
before he built his own house.

WESCHLER: Did you--

DIONE NEUTRA: We saw him occasionally, we had dinner with him, and I think he also came here. But I don't remember.

WESCHLER: What kind of person is Eames?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was a charming man, charming, a real charmer. I heard him later on. He and Mr. Neutra were invited to lecture in Seattle and, being accustomed to Mr. Neutra's way of lecturing, I was just horrified; I thought he gave a very poor lecture. But he was so charming that the public liked him. [laughter] And we were together with him also in 1954 when the German government invited us for four weeks to come to Germany.

WESCHLER: With Eames?

DIONE NEUTRA: With Eames.

WESCHLER: Any other people, or just the two?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, there were twenty-five American architects who were invited.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh, I see. Was there a personal relationship between them beyond just personal regard for each other?

DIONE NEUTRA: Mr. Neutra and Eames? Oh, very much so. He admired Eames very much--and, I think, vice versa.

WESCHLER: Was there friendship as well?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I would think so. Yes.

WESCHLER: And how about with Ray Eames?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, also.

WESCHLER: To what extent was she a participant with Charles?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, that was just a marvelous cooperation between the two. It was wonderful.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. That would come out also in terms of social gatherings?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: They were on equal footing.

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely. Yes.

WESCHLER: Did you have any particular relationship with Mrs. Eames?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, she still likes me very much and is always delighted when she sees me. Occasionally, I go there and have lunch with them in their studio.

WESCHLER: What is she like?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, you know, she's very buxom; but she's very lively and very artistic, and, I think, is a very good organizer. But I think he is more artistic. I think that she is the one who keeps the whole thing running, I have the feeling.

WESCHLER: I see. Well, let's talk about some of the even younger people. Craig Ellwood and Alvin Lustig are also two people who come to mind.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I think I remember Mr. [Carl] Maston built a little building here on Silver Lake which we liked very much. So I told Richard, I said, "Write him.

Tell him how much you like the building." And he did.

WESCHLER: And how about some of the other young architects coming along?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I think not. Later on, Mr. Neutra had an evening seminar. But that comes much later.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. So basically, though, in the late forties and early fifties, what had been a very limited modern architectural movement in Los Angeles was really beginning to blossom rather dramatically.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Do you know the name of Robert Ardrey?

WESCHLER: No, who was that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Robert Ardrey has written a book African Genesis, and he is an American author who then became very much interested in Leakey's and Dart's excavations in South Africa, so he wrote this book African Genesis and The Territorial Imperative, two-volume book. In 1967, he wrote something very beautiful to Mr. Neutra. He compares himself and Mr. Neutra, and he says that when he has written a book he is through with it. And he says,

The music of a Liszt will live, but it will never be quite the same without Liszt at the piano. Never quite the same, yet never forgotten either. There's probably no city in the world where the influence of your work and your ideas cannot be read in stone and stucco, realized by men you never met. This is a genuine immortality when what a man has done so thoroughly imbues his time that it takes on a kind of anonymity

like a sperm in a gene pool: nobody quite remembers who was the donor but there it is, a portion of a population's resource forever. Your concepts of living have in many ways been like that. I can remember times in Los Angeles in the thirties when there was only one man, Richard Neutra, and you said, "That's a Neutra house." Nobody else could have built it. And then later you look at a house and you said, "Look at the Neutra influence." But then later on, unless you were a Neutra fan and connoisseur, you wouldn't say it, because your concepts have spread so widely and deeply into domestic architecture that they had become part of the modern way of life. That's where, like a mutated gene, you entered into our gene pool, improving the stock for all time.

WESCHLER: That's a lovely letter.

DIONE NEUTRA: I think that is very beautifully expressed.

WESCHLER: Did Mr. Neutra have that sense of equanimity about the fact that, in a way, his ideas were being taken up by all these young people, or was he somewhat anxious about it?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was anxious about it that if there were so many, that as I mentioned before, that he wouldn't get a job anymore.

WESCHLER: Did he resent it in any way that--

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: --his things were being stolen, or ideas were stolen, in that sense?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no.

WESCHLER: In a way, he took it as a tribute, I suppose.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I think he did.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. OK, let's return to your chronology.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. Let me see. In 1948 he also received the first honorary doctor's degree from the [University of] Graz and in that year his book Architecture of Social Concern was published. He met the publisher, Gerth Todtmann, in 1944 when we were in Brazil. And he told us later that-- This book was the result of all the work he had done for Puerto Rico: tropical hospitals, tropical health centers, tropical schools. And the publisher told us that all the mayors in the interior of Brazil were buying the book, because there was nothing available on that. So it became quite a success. And it was written in Portuguese and in English.

In that year my sister Regula, who had been a captain under General Patton, as a nurse during the war in Germany, came back. And as she was at loose ends, Mr. Neutra proposed that she join us. And she came in our office and then stayed with us for seven years.

WESCHLER: She lived here in the house?

DIONE NEUTRA: She lived in the house.

WESCHLER: I see. Now, let's see, who was living in the house at that point? That was rather crowded, I take it.

DIONE NEUTRA: At that point, no, it wasn't crowded: just the three children, and we had the garden house--

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: --so that was all right. We also flew to

Bozeman, Montana, where he had a very successful week's seminar. And this was always a respite for me, because without all these trips, I don't think our marriage would have survived, because during the day, you know, our life was from five to eleven, and a constant strain and stress and disappointment and despair during the day. But then when we went away, as soon as we sat in the plane, we would hold hands, and everything would fall away from us, and we would be very happy. And I would enjoy it, because he had such a marvelous way with students. It's really a pity that he never became a professor, but I think the regular life as a professor wouldn't have appealed to him. But to talk with these young people, and to talk to an audience when he was in a good mood, he was just a fascinating speaker, and everybody just enjoyed it tremendously.

On September 26, we were invited for a six weeks' trip to Europe.

WESCHLER: What year is this now?

DIONE NEUTRA: That is in 1948. He lectured in Paris, London, Oslo, Goteborg, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Basel, Milan, Venice, Florence, and Rome. When the architects invited us, Mr. Neutra told them, he said, "Whenever I come to a city, the architectural association invites other architects. I would be interested if you would

invite your mayor, the city council, all the people who make difficulties for you. And I would like that you tell me what difficulties you have in your town planning, and I will try to help you. And let's put the lecture at the end of my stay"--we were usually three days in each place--"and also the press conference. And then the first two days you take me around and you explain everything to me, and then I will try to help you."

He had such a marvelous, humorous way to touch on a subject, and he would discuss the difficulties these architects had from his own standpoint, as if he had discovered it himself, not mentioning that the architects had told him about it. Then he would propose some remedies, what he thought could be done. And then that also would be said in the press conference. And I would say that in at least three instances the architects wrote us afterwards that his coming and his help had put a measure over the hump for which they had battled for years.

WESCHLER: Which particular three instances, offhand?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember now. But I only remember, I mean, how--

WESCHLER: --you got these letters.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, because he had an amazing knack of understanding a situation and seeing all the ramifications.

WESCHLER: Both the architecture of the building and also of the people.

DIONE NEUTRA: Of the people, of all the various warring forces and so on. It was very interesting. And I would like to read just one paragraph, what I wrote to our office:

I wonder how many of you realize that you are not working just for Mr. Neutra or for an individual client but for a world audience. Of course, you all knew that he was a good architect, but have any of you realized that there are, especially here, in Italy, teachers and students who claim that he is the greatest architect today? Mr. Neutra laughs it off. But they claim--and told me so--that they consider him more human than Le Corbusier, that he fits our time better than Frank Lloyd Wright, whom they considered too romantic. Everything that comes out of our office is known and thoroughly studied in the Italian universities. To thousands of young people, he is a hero, a legend of a man who apparently accomplished in an integrated way what he set out to do. Not once, but many times, I've been told that this or that young man only could stand the horrors of war and misery here, because a man-like Richard Neutra lived and worked. His coming to Italy is evidently a tremendous event. You who work with him usually see him harassed, tired out, embroiled in many small details, often irritable, and only those of you who either come early or stay late sometimes get a glimpse of the man and his mind when he is in repose, not under pressure, free to think and let his fancies guide him hither and thither. When I see what all these young minds here think of him, I can better appreciate his idea of twenty years ago to train and form a group of assistants who would stick it out with him, develop into collaborators, so that one could have the courage to tackle bigger jobs with so accomplished systematics. Maybe such a thing would be possible in Europe. But the rugged American individualism makes young people often impatient as soon as they think they have learned enough they leave. To carry on with steadiness for many years, to even think of making it a life career to stay with a man like Mr. Neutra, would yield great results for everyone who could do it, I should think.

WESCHLER: Now, when you write that to the office here, in Los Angeles, what is that office consisting of at that point?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, the main people at that time were John Blanton, Benno Fischer, Sergei Koschin, and Dion, and then other apprentices. I don't--

WESCHLER: How many people in the office at any given moment?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, we could handle, I think, up to ten. But usually there were not more than six or seven.

WESCHLER: And this was the office here, in the house?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was the office here, in the house.

WESCHLER: Downstairs? Uh-huh. And are there any in particular who you want to talk about at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, especially John Blanton. When he first came, Mr. Neutra was just delighted, because he had the feeling that here is a young man who really understands things. But then, unfortunately, he had to leave for the army, and then he was gone for, I think, two years; but then he came back to us and then eventually he became a collaborator. And about him I shall speak later.

WESCHLER: So we have him in Europe in 1948, '49.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. That's right. When we came back, I write, in 1949, I note in my diary that we have only

three new jobs, and he was very much afraid that he would have to let his people go. And then in 1949 was a Time cover story.

WESCHLER: Huh. That was the year that that story occurred.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And he was recommended by Douglas Haskell, who was the editor of the Architectural Record and later on the editor of the Architectural Forum. We were befriended with him and visited him in New York. And so he recommended him to Time's people.

WESCHLER: And how did that work out? Did these people come out and interview him here?

DIONE NEUTRA: They came out and interviewed us here. And Mr. Neutra was pretty horrified, because there is one paragraph where he supposedly goes around with a stick and tells his clients, "This furniture goes out and this furniture goes out." He said, "They made a mistake and pulled out the Frank Lloyd Wright drawer [file]," because he never did such a thing.

WESCHLER: Was he otherwise satisfied with the article?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Was he satisfied with the reporters? Were they intelligent?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, they were intelligent. And we were at that time befriended with Carey McWilliams.

WESCHLER: Can you talk about him? We've just finished interviewing him for the program.

DIONE NEUTRA: Ah, yes. Yes. Yes, we were very much impressed with him, and we saw quite a bit of him when he lived here.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was a very erudite and very socially minded person. And he predicted that Mr. Neutra would get quite a few jobs through this; and, in fact, he got a residence in Long Island, in Michigan, in Spokane, in Louisiana, and in Iowa--

WESCHLER: All out of this article.

DIONE NEUTRA: --as a result of this. And, of course, his standing in the community just rose precipitously, because that was just like a baronetcy, you know, to be on the cover of Time.

WESCHLER: How often does someone from Los Angeles make the cover of Time, for starters?

DIONE NEUTRA: But that did not please him as much as when in 1954 Norman Cousins featured him on the cover of the Saturday Review.

We are now in March 1950, when John Blanton joined the office.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. But in 1949 he also worked on Palomar College in Vista. We had to go very often down there. And then in November '49, he had his first coronary thrombosis.

And that was just a terrible thing, because, you see, everything had been dependent on him, and the doctors told him that he has to learn to delegate. So he--

WESCHLER: How serious of a heart attack was it?

DIONE NEUTRA: He stayed six weeks in bed.

WESCHLER: Was it near fatal, or was it--

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: It was relatively mild.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was relatively mild. But he had-- All throughout the year he had great pains. And all of us-- my sister Regula and I and Dion--we had to learn-- For instance, I had to take over all the banking and investments, and I had to learn to answer letters, client letters, and he would just look them over and make a few corrections. And everybody had to take over some of the things. He was supposed to work three hours a day, but pretty soon he would stay in bed, and he would not go to the office anymore. And here maybe I should see whether I can find another quote which is-- No, he says here--

WESCHLER: This is again your diary.

DIONE NEUTRA: That would be in my diary. He told me how isolated he feels, and that nobody understands him.

"Even I find that it is not necessary that he corrects his letters and articles so many times, that they have to be retyped four or five times. The same thing with the drawings. Did I ever think about it that it was this

carefulness which was the key to his success? I should try to think about it, and every time that I have to rewrite a letter, I should say, 'This is how a genius works.'" I think that's an excellent idea. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Well, I suppose if that works, do it that way. [laughter] If that will help you get through retyping a letter, any little mantra you want.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And--

WESCHLER: So during those six weeks, he was in bed.

DIONE NEUTRA: During the six weeks, he was in bed.

WESCHLER: Was he able to delegate authority, or was it difficult?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was very difficult. He tried to, but-- Here again, I would like to read from my diary.

This is now 1951.

Yesterday evening we took a walk in the park and had an interesting conversation. We were asking ourselves what the reason could be that we lived such a hand-to-mouth existence. Here Richard is a world-renowned figure. Wherever he gives a lecture, he meets the "right" people, whereas here, in Los Angeles, we hardly know people of prominence. How did [A.] Quincy Jones do it? or [Paul] Laszlo? To us, people come who want to build sixteen-, eighteen-, twenty thousand dollar houses. By accident, we get a school and live on that. By accident, we get an insurance building by people who live in Seattle--

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AUGUST 9, 1978

WESCHLER: We're in the middle of a diary entry where you're kind of wondering how other people get by in the world and how you yourself get by financially.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

By accident we get an insurance building by people who live in Seattle. Had they lived in Hollywood, they would not have come to us. It is true that we have managed to earn much, but Richard has to work so much harder designing many small houses. Here he is known as a prominent residential architect, but most of his larger houses are commissioned by people who live elsewhere. It is always a bone of contention between us that I do not invite more, have more parties, but I used to have them and the result of being invited back or making contacts that way has been nearly nil. Also, through our clients have we hardly any new work, although most of them are so enthusiastic. We are at a low ebb at the moment, and Richard is very sad thinking he might have to let Benno and [Frederick] Reichl go.

WESCHLER: What year is this now?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's 1951.

WESCHLER: So here he'd been on the cover of Time magazine, he was world renowned, and you were still having these financial worries. Now, is there going to be any point where you stop having these worries? Is there any time when you're really--

DIONE NEUTRA: No. Oh, yes. Later on we didn't have any financial worries, but he simply couldn't cope with

life. For instance, on August 22, I write:

Yesterday we visited [Milton] Goldman, a client, and Richard complained again bitterly about his assistants. It seems a shame that he has to bother whether his draftsmen put electrical outlets in the right place or provide them at all; or do not let a curtain track run smack over a hanging lighting fixture as Mr. Reichl did just now. We are preparing bids for the American Crayon Company, who have leased Northwestern space. It is a small alteration job, but without Richard organizing, everything stays at loose ends. He told me there was no end to what he could do if he had collaborators who did not forget, who followed his suggestions, et cetera. He is so submerged in small detail work and corrections that he does not find time to design anything.

WESCHLER: So all of this was at issue during the time he was being told he had to delegate authority--

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: --some of his difficulties?

DIONE NEUTRA: Right.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: In January 1952, I write: "Richard is working agonizingly on Guam assignment," or maybe that comes later, then.

WESCHLER: Well, why don't we--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Before we continue this, we should talk about some of the-- One thing in particular we should talk about-- I don't know where it is on your chronology--is the public housing here, in Los Angeles, which occurred around this time, between '48, '49, '50, that general period.

DIONE NEUTRA: This I have on the pages which I have prepared for the association with Alexander.

WESCHLER: Should we perhaps hold off on that then?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: We'll do that all at once. I see. He worked on that project with Mr. Alexander.

DIONE NEUTRA: He worked on that--yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: I see. OK. One other thing that he was doing during this period that we might talk about as a general topic, and tell the whole story of, is his book Survival Through Design.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: We haven't really talked about that except off tape, so perhaps you can bring us up to date on what that was about.

DIONE NEUTRA: He kept thinking about the book while he was talking to his clients, because he felt that an architect should have some kind of a platform to stand on from which he could explain and defend his designs, because if a client says, "I like that," and the architect doesn't like it, what is he going to do about it? After all, it's the client's money, and that's what he wants. So he felt that if he could explain it on a scientific basis, as he knew so much about human biology, that then the client would have an alternative. For instance, if he wanted to have one wall pink and the other one green,

Mr. Neutra could tell him, "Well, it has been discovered in the laboratory that this color combination produces nausea, and why don't you think about it whether you really want to have that."

WESCHLER: Yes, I really do want nausea. [laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: So if they decided they wanted to have that color combination, he would then try to somehow make a composition where it would not be too terrible, because his main object always was to make his clients happy. If that was what made them happy and he could not persuade them to change their minds, then he would try somehow to digest it.

WESCHLER: So, how did this relate to the book?

DIONE NEUTRA: So, then he started to write about it, and in 1942 he already had thirty-two chapters. And I mention in the tape when he went to Bennington that I thought that there he would have time to finish the book, and all the pretty girls, as Raymond called them, type for him. And the book was really finished in 1944. And then the long laborious road started, to find the publisher.

WESCHLER: Now, what kinds of objections did publishers have to it? Why wasn't it just published right off? We didn't do that on tape, so you might talk about that a little bit.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Well, they just felt that it was much too voluminous, that he touched on too many subjects--

art and history and physiology and biology and sociology-- they didn't know on what shelf the book should belong. And so for that reason apparently all the readers who read it simply couldn't make anything out of it. Until it finally, I think 1949, came to Oxford Press.

WESCHLER: This is seven years after.

DIONE NEUTRA: Seven years. And in between, he always-- Whenever publishers sent it back and gave reasons why, he would try and rewrite it. I think he has rewritten it eight times. And then finally, Oxford Press said they would print it but only if they could edit it. And unfortunately, the editor was a Russian who didn't like Pavlov.

WESCHLER: Now, Neutra did like Pavlov?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Everything which he learned about physiology he learned through a Russian psychiatrist, or physiologist, named [N.] Ischlondsky.

WESCHLER: This was a friend of his or a writer?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was a physician and also a writer, and we met him. He told me once, this Ischlondsky told me, he said, "I would like to take Mr. Neutra with me on the lecture platform, because although he is an architect, he understands my theory better than most other physiologists."

WESCHLER: Ischlondsky was here, in Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was in New York, and he only occasionally

came here.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: But whenever he came here we had most fascinating discussions with him.

WESCHLER: This was another case of how--

DIONE NEUTRA: --another case of learning from him.

WESCHLER: How had Neutra met him?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think we met through Dr. Ziskind, another psychiatrist.

WESCHLER: How far back had this association--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, that must have been 1941, 1942.

WESCHLER: You met him here or in--

DIONE NEUTRA: We met him here. We met him here.

WESCHLER: And then you would see him also in New York?

DIONE NEUTRA: And then we would see him also in New York.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, he was a very polished, mysterious person. We had absolutely no idea from what he lived. He told us he had a laboratory in France. He lived, really, in Paris, and he had an apartment in New York, and he went to all the scientific congresses. But I think he was regarded among the physiologists like Mr. Neutra was regarded by the architects: far out.

WESCHLER: What was he doing that was far out?

DIONE NEUTRA: But he was a pupil of Pavlov. And so Mr. Neutra tried to relate what he had learned through

these Pavlov experiments to architecture. And all these chapters this editor wanted to cut out. And they came back, and then Mr. Neutra very painstakingly put them back again, sent them back again. And this he did at four o'clock in the morning, before this hectic architectural work started.

WESCHLER: Pavlov, today, has a fairly low currency among people, because it's felt that his experiments were somehow, not exactly antihuman, but that they didn't bring out-- that they made as if human beings were the same as dogs; that could be, you know--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Was there a similar kind of anti-Pavlovian feeling among people who criticized your husband's work?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No, no, I think that--

WESCHLER: Was that the problem in the book?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. No, no, I think that the book then was published--Mr. Ischlondsky told him that when it was published, he said, "You are fifty years ahead of your time." That was really true. I think that the book, only after he was sixty-eight, the paperback edition came out, and I think people were more ready for it at that time than they were in 1954, although it had very many good reviews.

WESCHLER: Why did the editor dislike Pavlov, the one who disliked him? What did he dislike about him?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't know. We never met him. But he then, fortunately, was dismissed, and a new editor then accepted Mr. Neutra's revisions, and finally the book was published in 1954.

WESCHLER: And you mentioned that there were not too terribly large sales at that time. How did it sell?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, it sold quite well.

WESCHLER: Oh, I see. But it was really only appreciated later?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think so. And I think that most architects never read it, because we never saw-- Only lately, I think, I can see some of his ideas percolate. But he's not recognized as the inventor of these ideas. It was just like this gene pool: they have just taken it over and are using it.

WESCHLER: I see. Well, continuing with the chronology, I should mention that we made a decision to keep the Robert Alexander material more or less to the side for the time being and do that all at once later on. So we can continue a little bit farther along with things that he was doing during the years, besides his association with Alexander.

DIONE NEUTRA: I wrote to my sister in '49: "If Richard could learn to delegate, he would live longer. However, he tells me it is as if one would ask Toscanini to close

an eye and not mind if the flute plays out of tune or the cello is half a tone lower." [laughter]

WESCHLER: So that continued as a problem there even after his heart attack.

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely. In 1950, there was a discussion with Willard D. Morgan in New York who published Mystery and Realities of the Site, which was his first American publication. Barbara and Herb Morgan lived at that time in Scarsdale, and he had a photographic store in New York. And we always visited them when we went there.

WESCHLER: So he's been publishing all over the world, but 1950 is the first time he's published in the United States.

DIONE NEUTRA: It's the first book in the United States. And also, in 1950 we finally had to put our son Frank into Camarillo State [Hospital], which was a very, very sad day for me, because I always hoped that a miracle would occur and he could still be normal.

WESCHLER: How old was he at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Let me see--1950--he was twenty-six.

WESCHLER: Can you talk a little bit about his-- We left him more or less as a child; in fact, the last we talked about him was after your dealings with the foster parents and so forth. Can you talk about his upbringing?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Well, we tried to--I tried to teach him

myself after Mr. Neutra gave me an outline what we should do with him. And he also went to school, as I mentioned, when we started the house here; but then they sent him back, because he became apparently too noisy. And then we kept him at home for a long time, and he became sort of my housekeeper. And he was an A-1 worker, I mean, whatever he did was perfect. And if it was not, he became very distraught. But he was able to go to a restaurant, he was able to order a meal, he was able to take a bus, I could send him to the store to buy something for me, and he would bring back the money. And then I had a housekeeper, 1948 I think, who chided me that I kept him as a household drudge and did not recognize how intelligent he was. And she tried-- She took him on trips, and I had to buy him some very nice clothes, and she worked with him. I remember that once she tried to explain to him the difference between rotating and revolving, because he became very much interested in the stars. And I happened to come into the kitchen when his face was completely illuminated, and he said, "I've got it! I've got it!" because it was a very complicated, you know--

WESCHLER: --distinction.

DIONE NEUTRA: --distinction between revolving and rotating. But then apparently she overtaxed him. And one day we were invited, and when I came home, the whole house was illuminated and there were a group of neighbors outside,

and they told me that Frank had started to scream and to yell at the top of his voice, "I'm going to commit suicide. Now I know I will never get better. I can never get better. Never, never, never!" And he worked himself into a frenzy of despair, and people called the police, and this woman didn't know how to handle him. She had simply gone away; she had taken a walk and had left him alone. And then we hired a physiotherapist who had worked with Sister Kenny, and he put hot compresses on his spine. And he suddenly started to remember everything which had happened to him which made him unhappy as a child, and he accused me of spanking him or whatever. And then he again started to yell, and we had an office in the house, and we just couldn't keep him. So Dr. Ziskind put him in this sanitorium, and he got the electric shocks, and then he came back to us, I think, for a year; but then we simply couldn't handle him anymore. You see, this nervous atmosphere in our house was simply poison to him.

WESCHLER: Short of the extreme calamities, in what way was his emotional retardation--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, his speech center was injured.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: You see? His whole speech center and association center. And then he was for twenty years in Camarillo, where nobody talked to him and where he completely deteriorated. And only now, since I've been able to take him

out, he has come to life again, and he's interested and I enjoy having him home. So it's much, much better now.

WESCHLER: He is here now, or he is--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he's in a halfway home in Canoga Park. I have lunch with him once a week, and twice a month he comes here for a few days.

WESCHLER: And during the time that he was in Camarillo, to what extent were you able to see him?

DIONE NEUTRA: Once a month. And there he was-- For ten years he had a terrible time there. And then, by accident, we designed a house for the director of Camarillo, the medical director, who did not know that Frank was his patient. And after that he had his own room, he could make puzzles, and he could draw. But when this man then died, he was again put back with 185 idiots and old men, and he just sat around; there was nothing to do. So it was terrible.

WESCHLER: To what extent did that infringe upon Mr. Neutra's--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, it was a shadow on us. And of course, I realized [that] I had to-- Did I talk about Raymond, that I had to put him in a school?

WESCHLER: No.

DIONE NEUTRA: No? Well, I think in 1944, when we came back from South America, I noticed that he became very listless, he looked very pale, and also he was put back half a year in school, because he couldn't learn to read. And when I

took him to the school psychologist and they tested him, he tested at eleven years of age in all the tests.

WESCHLER: How old was he at this time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Seven. So, I always knew that he was brilliant, but I think he was simply bored in school. So then-- But we had to put him in a school while we went to South America for three months, and he was very unhappy there. So I knew that I could not put him again in another school, but I felt that the nervous atmosphere in our house was absolute poison for him. And then we met Mrs. Chadwick, who has a school [Chadwick School] in Rolling Hills; we invited her and Raymond was the official greeter at our parties. He looked absolutely-- He was a beautiful boy; he had a blue suit with long pants, and he would greet the people and take their coats and bring them upstairs.

WESCHLER: He was at that school, though?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not yet. He was in public school.

WESCHLER: Oh, I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And then I told Mrs. Chadwick what difficulties I had with him, because she was so charmed with him, and she said, "Why don't you send him to summer school?" So I sent him to summer school, and then after summer school, Raymond said, "Oh, Mother. Such a wonderful school, I wish I could be there all the time!" So then now I had to persuade Mr. Neutra, because it was very expensive, that we should send him there.

WESCHLER: Was this a school that he would stay there?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that was a boarding school.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And although at the public school they taught him for three years about California, in that school he learned about the Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians, and he became a world citizen when he was ten years old. It was the best thing that ever happened.

WESCHLER: Was that difficult for you though, to have him away?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. But then he came home twice a month, and then we tried to do things with him; Mr. Neutra tried not to work, and so that was much better. I think it was much better.

WESCHLER: So you have this very wide range of experience with your children.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: A whole range of interactions.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That always came in between, you know. I mean, I would read a story to Raymond, and Mr. Neutra would come and say, "Could you come and quickly type a letter for me?" So I would say to Raymond, "Raymond, I'm so sorry, I'll finish later on." Then I would type the letter, and I would go to the mailbox and mail it, and then I would come back and finish the story.

WESCHLER: What has Raymond become?

DIONE NEUTRA: Raymond is now a professor of epidemiology at UCLA--

WESCHLER: Oh, I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: --in the health department.

WESCHLER: He clearly was testing well above his age.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, yes.

WESCHLER: OK. Well, why don't we continue with what you have on your chronology.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. And on December 17, my son Dion--

WESCHLER: When is this?

DIONE NEUTRA: That is 1950.

WESCHLER: And what happened?

DIONE NEUTRA: Dion married.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: In 1953--I don't have any notes from 1952, somehow.

WESCHLER: You mentioned the Guam project for 1952 a few minutes ago, I think.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. That's right. That comes then together when we speak about Alexander. Now I bet I have nothing for 1952. [laughter]

WESCHLER: OK, perhaps it was primarily material with Alexander during that year, so we will come back to that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And in March, fourteenth of March, 1953, Mr. Neutra had a second heart attack.

WESCHLER: Was that because he had been disobeying doctors' orders?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he did absolutely not obey doctors' orders. The doctors were absolutely horrified. But they wanted him to sleep until eight o'clock, and then shut himself in until noon and write his books then. But he knew that everything would go at sixes and sevens in the office, so it simply wasn't advice which he could follow. But now there followed months of despair, how to carry the load of two offices.

WESCHLER: Now you had two offices?

DIONE NEUTRA: By then we had two offices. And in 1954, I said that Survival Through Design was published, and also he came on the cover of the Saturday Review; and that, I think, was the thing which pleased him most of all, because he was recognized as a philosopher and thinker, and that made him much happier than the Time cover.

WESCHLER: Where he was just recognized as a celebrity.
[laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. In 1954 we had a visit from the German cultural attaché, and he invited us to come to Germany. And with this group that I mentioned was Charles Eames and also the president of the AIA at that time. And we visited fourteen cities, and whenever we arrived, we would be invited by the mayor of that city. And as soon

as the German architects heard that Mr. Neutra was among the group, they became terribly excited; and during the first introduction, they spoke mainly about him and what it meant for them that he had come to visit Germany--completely ignoring the president of the AIA. So at the next city I would go to the translator and whisper in his ear to please not translate all the eulogies which were spoken about Mr. Neutra.

WESCHLER: Can I ask you a question about going to Germany? Many of the émigrés that we've interviewed talk about how difficult it was to go back to Germany after the war, or talk about how--just generally talk about that it wasn't the equivalent of going to France; going to Germany was somehow, symbolically, a difficult thing to do.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. But, you see, Mr. Neutra, he did not flee Germany, he came on his own free will.

WESCHLER: Did he have, however, any kind of feelings that it was a significant gesture to go to Germany?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think he felt that, and, of course, we were very much interested. I have written all sorts of descriptions of what happened during that trip. It was again a triumphal trip for him, and he was made honorary doctor of the University of Charlottenburg at that time.

WESCHLER: Did you visit on that trip any of the concentration camps or things like that?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. And in that year, he also made quite a few trips east and worked with Thaddeus Longstreth. I would like to talk about Thaddeus Longstreth. Thaddeus Longstreth was our draftsman during the building of the Kaufmann house, and he then moved to Princeton and became Mr. Neutra's eastern collaborator. He was a great disciple of his, with the greatest admiration, and I think during ten years Mr. Neutra designed ten or fifteen houses in the East for which he [Longstreth] did the working plans, for which he did the supervision. And they had a very wonderful relationship with each other.

WESCHLER: What kind of person was he?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was a lieutenant colonel in the American army, but then, very late, studied architecture. And, I mean, you would immediately, when you see his building, you would immediately see the Neutra influence. He built a very beautiful library in Princeton, and always acknowledged how much he owed to Mr. Neutra.

WESCHLER: Was he teaching at Princeton?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he was not teaching.

WESCHLER: Just living there.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he had his own practice. And he also, for instance, was responsible for the Lincoln Memorial Museum at Gettysburg.

WESCHLER: I've always wondered what on earth Neutra was doing out in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

DIONE NEUTRA: That was an interesting story, by the way.

WESCHLER: Perhaps tell it.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. We were in Arizona, Mr. Neutra gave a lecture there, and when we came back to the hotel, there was a telephone message he should call Washington. But it was a Sunday and on account-- We were supposed-- Somebody was going to pick us up and drive us through the desert and show us a house, and on account of the time differential we could not telephone. So in the middle of the desert, Mr. Neutra said, "Now I must have a telephone. Is there a telephone anywhere?" All we saw were the saguaro cactuses all around us. So our driver said, "Well, about a mile from here there's a little restaurant. I think there is a telephone." So we went there, and Mr. Neutra just stayed in the booth for, oh, at least fifteen minutes; and then he came out, absolutely walking on air, and he said, "Imagine, I've just been commissioned to design the Lincoln Memorial Museum in Gettysburg." And our driver looked at him and said, "You mean to tell me that our government is spending a million dollars to commemorate the defeat of the Confederacy?" [laughter] He was a Southerner. And that was enough for Mr. Neutra to immediately recognize that here was a difficulty which he should try to bridge.

All the people in the park department were interested what kind of shoelaces the soldiers wore, and what kind of

knapsacks, and what kind of shoes and so on, and Mr. Neutra tried to see whether he could not find a common denominator. And finally he thought that Lincoln's speech, Gettysburg speech, which tried to harmonize the South and the North, was something which he wanted to emphasize. And although it was not in the program, he suggested to the secretary of the interior to have a large sliding door which would open onto a green, onto the grass, and have a lecture platform, and that once a year a lecturer would be invited from Pakistan or from other places all over the world who would speak about Lincoln's ideals. But then he was later told that that belongs to the State Department, not to the Department of the Interior. But anyway, he thought maybe sometimes there might be an enlightened secretary of the interior who could see the value of this.

WESCHLER: Did he have much of a sense of American history? I mean, had he thought much about Abraham Lincoln before he even had this commission?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

WESCHLER: Did he--

DIONE NEUTRA: We are befriended with Charles Beard, as I mentioned, and so they, I'm sure that they talked very much about American history and--

WESCHLER: Did he read Lincoln biographies during this period? Was that part of his research for that?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't think so.

WESCHLER: So, he saw it primarily as an architectural problem, not so much as a historical issue.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: OK.

DIONE NEUTRA: And also in 1954, he gave his literary estate to UCLA. He had a talk with-- We met Chancellor [Raymond B.] Allen, and he seemed to be so interested in Mr. Neutra's ideas that Mr. Neutra had the feeling that maybe he should leave his things to UCLA. And Mr. Allen also told me, when I told him that I'm keeping a diary, he said, "Oh, that would be very, very worthwhile if you give that also to UCLA." And I might just as well mention here that I intend to do that, but in a closed filing cabinet, which may not be opened until thirty years after Dion's death. And that is the reason I'm reading these things now, because nobody will be able to see what's in my diaries. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Have you, by the way, been satisfied with the arrangement at UCLA over the years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, very dissatisfied.

WESCHLER: Dissatisfied?

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely horrified.

WESCHLER: Why?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because when I came there, everything was just lying in sixes and sevens, as the truck had brought

the things; nothing was done to it. He gave them \$4,000 also. Then years and years later, I think fifteen years later, Esther McCoy made some--how do you call it? You know, when you photograph--

WESCHLER: Microfilm?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, microfilms of the plans. And only now, Professor [Thomas] Hines, who is working on the biography, has started to make order in it. My heart just bled when I saw the difference between this treatment and the museum in Berlin, who is keeping Eric Mendelsohn's drawings, how beautifully they are put up and preserved.

WESCHLER: What happened with the \$4,000?

DIONE NEUTRA: This was used for the microfilming.

WESCHLER: I see. Are you getting a sense that it is beginning to be rectified now?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, now, I think, since Thomas Hines is there.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. [laughter] We calls them as we sees them, folks.

DIONE NEUTRA: But not in comparison, for instance, what Dave Gebhard has done with the Schindler archives in Santa Barbara. I mean, they are in very much better order than Mr. Neutra's things.

WESCHLER: Is there anyone in particular who's been at fault in that at UCLA, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think nobody was interested.

WESCHLER: Nobody took it to heart.

DIONE NEUTRA: Nobody took it to heart. Also in that year we designed a house in Havana, a very large house in Havana, and a house in Carácas, Venezuela.

WESCHLER: Now, are these coming partly out of your time in Puerto Rico, the general contacts you made at that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. This house in Havana came through Mrs. Zweibrück. Mrs. Zweibrück was a marvelous person who ran the American Crayon Company, which leased the top apartment of the Northwestern Insurance Company, where Mr. Neutra in 1950 had his second installation of movable louvers. And maybe I should mention at this time that the metal man who worked with Mr. Neutra on the detailing of the louvers then went into production and called it the Lemlar Company, started to advertise all over the world, and in the shortest time, these movable louvers were used all over the world. I think Mr. Neutra was the first one to use them here; I think they were first used in Buenos Aires. But Lemlar, for instance, only used stationary louvers. But here, this was the first time movable louvers were used.

WESCHLER: Was Neutra given credit for this development, or do you feel this man has stolen the idea?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think in the early times he has been given credit for that, but now nobody knows anymore.

WESCHLER: I see. He has enough other things that he is known for.

DIONE NEUTRA: And then, you know, when he built the Hall of Records, they became 150 feet high, and then for the first time were moved by an electronic eye. That was an interesting development. And during all this time-- we are now in 1955--both Mr. Neutra and my sister and Dion went to the psychologist in order to see how we could better the relationships, because Mr. Neutra felt that nobody helped him enough. And he, for instance, he could not understand how all these young people who came, that if he worked sixteen hours or fourteen hours a day, then they certainly should work sixteen hours a day, because they were so much younger and they were so enthusiastic. That they had a family life, that they wanted to go back to their wives, that was something which he simply couldn't understand. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Who was the psychologist that you went to see?

DIONE NEUTRA: Dr. Maurice Karpf.

WESCHLER: And what kind of regimen of psychology did you go through?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't really know. I don't think it was Freud.

WESCHLER: How often did you go?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, they went once a week. But the end result was, I think as I mentioned already, that both Dion

and my sister Regula left, and my sister Regula--

WESCHLER: It was just the three of them went together, or they went separately?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, they went separately, and occasionally we had meetings together.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: But my sister Regula felt that working for Mr. Neutra was like running after a locomotive: that you could never catch up with it. And she finally was near a nervous breakdown. And, you see, I could stand it, because I had my intimate life with Mr. Neutra where he was so loving and understanding and delightful with me, which she always, of course, didn't have.

WESCHLER: Were these years of sorrow and sadness in the family that there was so much tension?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, it was very difficult. When I read my diaries, I'm just absolutely horrified how I was ever able to stand it.

WESCHLER: How long did the psychotherapy continue?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think a year--a year.

WESCHLER: Do you think that during that whole time Neutra changed at all as a result of it?

DIONE NEUTRA: He completely changed.

WESCHLER: How so?

DIONE NEUTRA: He became from a charming, delightful, humorous man, he became a complaining, whining man. He was

just terrible.

WESCHLER: Did that persist then; did you--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. That became better, then, later on.

WESCHLER: What kinds of things in the psychoanalysis were making that happen, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think the psychologist tried-- Well, he just, you know, his perfectionism, he just couldn't stand it, that if any one of us made one mistake and that was multiplied by all the people in the office, by the mistakes which are made in the typing and the articles-- I mean, this was just like a mountain, then, at the end of the day.

WESCHLER: Were there any things that the psychoanalysis brought out about his own childhood, his own development, that he talked about?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he concentrated mainly on this office situation. It wasn't a psychoanalysis.

WESCHLER: It was much more just this specific problem.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was just trying to--try to interpret the various actors to each other. [laughter]

WESCHLER: I see. Did he have any sense, though, of where that perfectionism came from? I mean there are other architects who are not such--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, one doctor said he is a neurotic compulsive-- or compulsive neurotic. And I'm sure he was not. In many

of my diary notes I'm just disgusted with him. I say, any normal person can cope with life and does something if a situation is impossible, and you examine it and then you try to do something about it.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: But because he had trained these people, he was so afraid to let them go again, you know, and to try to start with new people. And they were simply not good enough to really disemburden him.

WESCHLER: Following the psychotherapy, was he better able to deal with people having wives and so forth?

[laughter]

DIONE NEUTRA: No.

WESCHLER: That just continued throughout his life?

DIONE NEUTRA: That continued throughout his life.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Do you think the psychotherapy was of value?

DIONE NEUTRA: I really don't think so, because the result was that two of the people he had depended upon had left him. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Was it of value to those two people to have left?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think so. I understood that. I could see it, that it was also a difficulty with my son Dion--

* * *

[This portion of the text has been sealed
at the request of the interviewee.]

* * *

But artistically, they got along very well. I mean, Dion understood his father very well and admired him, so that was all right. But as a person, it just didn't work.

WESCHLER: Well, we'll talk a little bit more in detail about that when we talk about Alexander also.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Do you have much more for today, or should we perhaps pause and go on to Alexander next time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. No, I think this is spring 1956.

WESCHLER: We're way up there now.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we had an invitation to fly to Turkey to be a juror on a university in Erzerum, and that was absolutely wonderful. Then later on, he gave a lecture in Italy in an old theater in Torino, and Olivetti sent out 10,000 invitations to all the mayors of Italy. And Mr. Neutra was very apprehensive about the translator, who was a young girl. He spent the whole morning with her, talking with her and trying to introduce her into his way of thinking. And then, when the big moment came and he

spoke the first sentence, she said, "Would you mind to repeat it again." And after she had done that ten times, after every sentence, his spirits flagged, and he gave the worst lecture I've ever heard him give. It was a disaster. [laughter]

WESCHLER: So much for the mayors of Italy.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: So you really were world travelers at this point again. I mean, you seemed to be going places every year by the late fifties.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Oh, I forgot one very important thing. In 1948, when we were in Paris, he was invited by La Grande Masse--that is a student organization of the Beaux Artes--and they gave us a torch parade around the Beaux Artes building. They put us in white tunics in an open Ford flanked by two motorcycles, followed by a taxicab with an orchestra in the place where you keep the suitcases, and this way they paraded us down the Champs-Élysées. [laughter] It was absolutely wonderful.

WESCHLER: This is 1948?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's 1948--

WESCHLER: The conquering hero.

DIONE NEUTRA: --during that big trip. And, I mean, this treatment, you know, [in] Italy [we] had the same treatment. I also forgot to mention that he had no intention of lecturing in Florence, because he had been there several

times; but when we checked in to the hotel in Florence, they had sent out written invitations for a lecture the next day. And Mr. Neutra was absolutely outraged. But they pleaded with him, and so finally, he didn't want to let them down, but he had laryngitis already in the morning, but he absolutely wanted to follow his program: he wanted to see Siena, so by the time he came up in the afternoon, he was so completely hoarse he couldn't speak a word. So he told me, he said, "Now, I'm going to lie down. You have seen me so often give a slide lecture, you can give the slide lecture." So that was the first time that I explained the slide lecture, and he started the lecture with the slides. And then after his nap he had sufficiently recovered so that he could give his lecture.

WESCHLER: Did you thereafter give the slide lecture more often?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. Only once: I remember that he was supposed to speak in a gallery in Westwood, and in the afternoon he got a call from San Diego to come right away to San Diego and apply for a big navy hospital. So he told me, "You can give the lecture." I said, "No, I can't give the lecture, I'm going to give a concert." So I showed the slides, and then I sang my cello songs and played, and everybody was delighted with me. They came up to me and said, "We were so disappointed when we heard Mr. Neutra was not coming, but you did beautifully." [laughter]

WESCHLER: And that is a pattern that you've continued to this day.

DIONE NEUTRA: To this day.

WESCHLER: Well, I guess we should probably stop for today. And when we take up next time, we'll talk about public housing in Los Angeles and about Alexander and about Dion.

DIONE NEUTRA: Very good.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 18, 1978

WESCHLER: We stopped our last public session--the last unsealed session--in 1957. You have a sheaf of notes there; we'll push forward.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. In my sealed tape I described in detail the years 1949 to 1960, the partnership years of RJN and Alexander. Now, in this, our last session, I will try to mention the highlights of the years '57 to Neutra's death, April 16, 1970. Nineteen fifty-six ended by us spending Christmas in Perris on the ranch of Clarence Muse. Do you know who Clarence Muse was?

WESCHLER: No.

DIONE NEUTRA: He was a very famous Negro actor whom we met during the Depression, when he was a member of the artistic cooperative.

WESCHLER: I see. Was he living in Perris because he had been blacklisted?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, he had a ranch there.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And also [we stayed] at the completed house in Shoshone, Death Valley, of Inyo supervisor Maury Sorrell, where Neutra completed the text for the second volume of his works called Buildings and Projects, in Switzerland. I gave a concert at the Happy Valley School

in Ojai and one arranged by John Anson Ford, then our supervisor, at the Hollywood Community Sing in May, which was a great event for me. [laughter] We completed the large [Jack] Friedland residence in Philadelphia, supervised by Thad Longstreth. In June, RJN participated in a design conference in Aspen. He also flew to Washington. In Washington I had breakfast with AIA Journal editor [Joseph] Watterson and was asked by him to write down what I had told him, how I helped RJN. I typed this manuscript on my knees in the plane, mailed it in Chicago, and he published it as is in the journal, under the title "How a Wife Can Help Her Husband Become a Good Architect." [laughter] It had great repercussions, as I found out during a trip in November when RJN supervised a house in Cincinnati, lectured at the museum in Cincinnati, lectured in Dayton, Ohio, and was for two weeks a design critic at a seminar in Raleigh, North Carolina. Everywhere the students had read this article and asked me about it. When he was in Raleigh, he wrote a letter with his students to Frank Lloyd Wright, and I just quote one passage from that. This was 13 December 1957:

Certainly today all serious architectural students are aware of your tremendous contribution to both the fiber and spirit of the art, and almost all are in sympathy with the means you have used in giving your ideas form, even though our own incipient philosophies and forms may be directed in many different ways. With

these thoughts in mind, we would like to join with Mr. Neutra in sending you heartfelt greetings at this Christmas season. With respectful wishes--
[Signed by fourteen students.]

WESCHLER: Had Neutra and Wright continued to have correspondence--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --through the years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we did.

WESCHLER: Was it important correspondence?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. It was just-- And he answered with this letter on November 25:

Dear Dione, So sweet a person should write so kind and sweet a note, and I'm happy to receive the acknowledgment, which takes me back to the days about 1924 at Taliesin, where all together we spent our evenings and our days, too. You and Richard must think of them occasionally. I have always felt Richard neglected his best interest in not making more of his relation to me and my work, trying, like most young men, to prove me old and themselves new. But then I know that is inevitable in America and so no indictment. You have been a lovely character in Taliesin life, and happiness is my wish for Dione, our songbird. Affection and salutations to the clever Richard.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: So Wright had the same feelings about Neutra that Neutra had about some of the people who worked under him.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. That's right. And now comes 1958. From now on I shall quote highlights from my

yearly letters. The one in 1958, on legal-sized paper, had eight pages, single space. "In February, RJN was invited to be the main speaker at the Patient-Centered Hospital Conference in St. Louis, Missouri." (That was very interesting. There were all sorts of nuns who were running hospitals, and this was, of course, quite down his alley, you know, a patient-centered hospital, and was very unusual at that time.) In March, he was the main speaker at the Industrial Development Workshop at the University of Arizona. At that time he received a phone call from the park department about commissioning him for the Lincoln museum in Gettysburg, which I already mentioned before. In the summer he was the main speaker at the museum directors conference in Charleston, and he was a juror together with [Pier] Luigi Nervi for the Reynold's Aluminum Competition in New York. At that time we met Nervi for the first time. And we met him then later, in Rome.

WESCHLER: What kind of relationship resulted from that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Later on he wrote a marvelous article when Mr. Neutra received an honorary doctor's degree and called him the greatest living architect today. He thought very highly of him.

He was invited by the students of the [University of the] Witwatersrand to come for two weeks to Johannesburg. At the same time, the city of Vienna

wanted to confer the prize of the city of Vienna [Honor Prize for Architecture--City of Vienna], so we decided to accept both invitations. We flew first to Brussels to visit the world's fair. We flew to Zurich to discuss the second volume of Richard Neutra: Buildings and Projects, published by Girsberger. We flew to Vienna to receive the prize. We flew to Rome. We flew to Nairobi. Someone took us on a private plane all over the animal reserves.

And this was absolutely marvelous; the plane would swoop down over these herds of wildebeests, for instance, and they just scattered, while the zebras just didn't pay any attention to it.

WESCHLER: Let me ask you before we pass this--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --about the trip to Vienna. Was there some kind of symbolic importance for Richard to be returning to Vienna?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. That was very symbolic.

WESCHLER: Can you talk about that a little bit?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. I think he had not been in Vienna for twenty years.

WESCHLER: How did he feel about Vienna? Did he feel that Vienna had rejected modernism or had not been supportive?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no, no. He was very fond of Vienna. Yes. And I remember we arrived, and they had arranged a

marvelous lunch at the Hotel Sacher for one o'clock. I think we arrived at eleven. So he first wanted to go to the Kalenberg, which is a mountain with a wonderful view on the city. Then he wanted to go to the house where he had lived for so many years. And he stepped on the grass to photograph it, and the janitor rushed out and said, "Do you think you're a crazy American that you can walk on the grass?" [laughter]

WESCHLER: And he had become a crazy American.

DIONE NEUTRA: He had become a crazy American. Well, he wanted to see so many things that we didn't get to the hotel until two o'clock. And at three o'clock, there was a big press conference, so we just had to hurry through that marvelous lunch with tafelspitz, which is a specialty for the Hotel Sacher, and all the other goodies. And during the press conference, I was wondering why the journalists all kneeled in front of him until we saw the picture: because he was sitting in front of Kaiser Joseph, and they photographed him in front with Kaiser Joseph in back of him. Of course, there was a big reception at the mayor's office, and there was a big to-do.

WESCHLER: Did he at any point think about returning to Vienna to live?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that comes later. Let me see. We

flew to Capetown, and in my yearly letter I describe all the interesting talks we had about apartheid. And we spent two very interesting weeks in Johannesburg with the students. They got me a cello, and I sang to the students, and I sang at a party at the house where we lived.

WESCHLER: So by this time this was really the routine: you were singing regularly--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, regularly. That's right.

WESCHLER: --and he was lecturing.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. We flew to the Belgian Congo, to Ghana, to north Nigeria. And there, that was very interesting, because in Nairobi we had participated in a government session, because our host had built the government house. And I could see how they exactly duplicated the sessions in London. And to see all these black people with their white wigs was really an experience. And in Nigeria we were very impressed to see how England tried to provide a takeover. And each black minister had a white minister at his side to help him. I thought that was wonderful. We flew to Senegal, to Rio, Brazil, and to Brasília; and everywhere, of course, lectures.

WESCHLER: Was this a tour that you had arranged yourself?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. We were invited.

WESCHLER: You had been invited as-- Was all of this one,

continuous invitation, or was it--

DIONE NEUTRA: What happened would be that we would say, "We are flying to Johannesburg," and we would have had previous invitations from these people, and we would say, "We come."

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: And Brasília was still a building site. That was very interesting. That was just-- I don't think even [Oscar] Niemeyer's buildings were up; they were just streets and a terrible shantytown.

WESCHLER: What did Neutra think of Brasília as a project?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, he first thought it was a great mistake that the civil engineers had removed all the topsoil, instead of leaving the topsoil and just putting the streets in between. This meant that the building site in the rain was just a mess of wet dust. And now it was just dry red dust: Mr Neutra's hair was completely red when we drove through there. He felt it was too formal a solution, and not enough thought had been given to the socioeconomic idea of a city.

Then we flew to New York, Washington, Philadelphia, seeing our diverse clients. In September, a second trip to Lincoln, Nebraska, to be a juror for a ninety-by-thirty-foot mural in a bank building, and Warshaw,

Howard Warshaw, got the prize.

WESCHLER: Oh, really? Did you know Howard Warshaw?

DIONE NEUTRA: No. We didn't know-- But it was really a very impressive mural of charging bulls. In October we flew to Montreal to discuss projects, and give a lecture at McGill University and visit Toronto. Later, main speaker at a conference of home economics teachers in Ames, Iowa. In November, RJN participated in a leadership program where ten prominent architects were interviewed by psychologists in Berkeley. One of the questions asked, for instance, was (and I quote from my yearly letter): "Here is a human arm. It is disintegrating fast. It is your duty to attach it to the human body in the best possible position." RJN replied, "If it has taken the good Lord several million years to fashion the human body with two arms, how do you expect me to find a good position for a third arm in forty-five minutes?" [laughter]

WESCHLER: Do the records for that particular survey still exist?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think so.

WESCHLER: Would they be at Berkeley or here?

DIONE NEUTRA: It would be in Berkeley. Yes. Besides the prize of the city of Vienna, he also received a gold medal from the Cuban Association of Architects for his house in Havana, and was elected honorary member of

the old Academy of Venezia [Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia] (which was apparently a very great honor). I now quote from the highlights of 1959: "Again a year filled with travels." (This letter had ten pages.)

WESCHLER: Let me ask you one question before we go into the travel specifically.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Without giving away what we talked about on the sealed tapes, this was not particularly a financially lucrative period for you; in fact, you were in financial straits all through the fifties.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right.

WESCHLER: How were you able to afford all these trips?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, these trips were all paid. They were all paid.

WESCHLER: Wherever you would go would be paid?

DIONE NEUTRA: We would be paid, and my trip was paid, too, because he wouldn't go without me. And I should perhaps mention, you know, that during all these trips, wherever we stopped, before I left I would leave a sheet and tell our secretaries in which city and in which hotel we could be reached. So when we reached that city, there would be a huge manila envelope with mail analyses of all the letters that had been received, with all the difficulties which had arisen. And then I would spend my time in the plane

typing answers to all these letters.

WESCHLER: And would you say that one of the reasons you were-- We've gone into great detail about what the fifties were like in the sealed tape, but would you say that the difficulties of living in Los Angeles that we talked about there were one of the reasons it was attractive to be out of Los Angeles a good deal?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was one of the reasons. And the other reason was that we would receive commissions from these trips, you see.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: So that was very important especially for the Neutra and Alexander office.

WESCHLER: How much of the year, on an average, during the later fifties were you out of town, out of Los Angeles?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, well, most of these trips were not more than two, three weeks.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: It was always very fast.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. In the early part of the year, a trip to Germany to be the keynote speaker at a two-day conference of a carpet concern. They not only paid both our trips first class but also a fabulous lecture fee. Our first stop was Paris and a lecture there. Then on to

Düsseldorf and Munich. RJN was asked by the promoter whether he could delicately mention the word carpet in his speeches. I would like to quote how he did that. RJN started his speech by mentioning how grateful he was to have been wafted on a magic carpet from California to Bavaria. [laughter] Later on in his speech he remarked that [and I quote] "the boundaries of a carpet spelled home for him. And if he ever was shot to the moon, one piece of equipment he would take along would be a carpet." [laughter]

Then we flew to Zurich to discuss a residence now built in Ascona, Italian Switzerland; from Zurich back to New York, on to Cincinnati to discuss a residence built there and participate in a symposium on art. Clifton Fadiman was one of the participants. On to Fayetteville to give a lecture at the University of Arkansas.

In May, I drove to Carmel, where John Nesbitt of radio fame spoke the introduction to a record I later made. Connecting with RJN in San Francisco, who gave a lecture at the opening of the UCLA Neutra show at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

At the end of May, a second trip to Europe, as RJN had been invited to be a juror at an international competition for a cultural center in the Belgian Congo.

And that was very interesting. Of course, a lecture in Brussels with all sorts of excitement, which I describe in my yearly letter. I think I should describe this here, because this is really interesting.

The consul, the American consul, had offered us a hall for 500, and Richard said it will not be enough. And the consul said, "Oh, all the students are in examinations; there won't be many students." Well, before we left the hotel we were already late. I had books in my hand, and the lecture and the slide box on top of it. I stumbled and the slide box fell down, and all the prepared lecture slides were on the floor. So it took us half an hour to get them back in the right sequence. And when we came to the hall, there were three buses outside. There were 750 people in the hall, and there were at least 300 people outside. So Mr. Neutra got to the podium and said, "I'm not going to speak here. I know there is a larger hall available about a block away." And so the people started to telephone, and this hall was available. So the whole audience walked to the park, which was about fifteen minutes [away], and the lecture started at ten o'clock and ended at midnight. This was typical. And perhaps I should mention here that he was asked to lecture at the Hollywood High School in one of these years, and they sent out 4,000 invitations; and in a hall of 1,500,

150 people showed up, which shows the difference of appreciation he had here in the United States altogether.

WESCHLER: What year roughly would that have been, the Hollywood?

DIONE NEUTRA: I think that must have been 1958.

WESCHLER: As late as that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. A lecture in Antwerp; a lecture in Berlin, where he met Karl Foerster, the great old man of landscape architecture, who influenced him when he was studying landscape architecture in Zurich. Fly to Stuttgart to discuss a new residence; fly to Milan to stay a few days with the clients of this residence in Morcote. Fly to Frankfurt, five-hour train ride to Düsseldorf, where we answered all the letters sent by our office. Now I would like to quote from my yearly letter. "While RJN fed me his manuscript, I typed the answers on my trusty Olivetti. Once the train stopped. I looked out of the window; Hagen, the sign read. We both looked at each other and stopped for a moment's reflection, because it was in Hagen that we had been married thirty-seven years ago. Could we have imagined in our wildest dreams how our lives would develop?"

WESCHLER: That's amazing.

DIONE NEUTRA: In the fall, a trip to South America as speaker for an art critics conference in Brasília. So

that was a year later, and meanwhile, the residence for [Juscelino] Kubitschek had been completed, and also another building. And many of the blocks had been started, but it was still a very deserty looking thing, and everybody told us that nobody-- The ministers don't want to move to a-- [bell rings--tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER: Back to USA.

DIONE NEUTRA: Back to USA. Train to Princeton to confer with our trusted collaborator Thad Longstreth, to discuss with him and visit several residential projects. We had quite a few houses at that time in the East. Later, in New York, a house in Stamford, Connecticut. Fly to Tulsa to discuss the city planning project there.

WESCHLER: One question, before we get past that long stretch.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Would you say that he was the most trusted of the collaborators that Neutra worked with over the years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Absolutely. We always had a wonderful relationship with him, and he was such an admirer. And I should say the only sour note was perhaps his wife, who felt that he didn't get paid enough, and he was-- For instance, on Gettysburg, I'm sure that he lost money, because he was the supervising architect, and it was quite far to drive from Princeton to Gettysburg.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: But in their personal relationship it was absolutely wonderful, and we always stayed with him, and it was a great pleasure. And he also had a very good relationship with all our eastern clients, and they liked him very much. Here I--yes-- Then from Tulsa we went to New Orleans and to the AIA convention. Here I want to quote again a few sentences from my yearly letter:

There were lots of speeches: a symposium on design chaired by Philip Johnson, speakers Yamasaki, Pereira, and Pratt from Vancouver. It was a witty, amusing convention, but RJN felt depressed. He wondered whether a convention of physicians or scientists would speak with such levity about their particular subjects. Also he felt somewhat sad to realize that apparently none of the speakers had ever read a line of his thinking. His book Survival Through Design apparently has many more readers in its German, Spanish, and Italian translations than in the USA.

WESCHLER: Why do you suppose that is?

DIONE NEUTRA: Because he was considered a residential architect. And, you know, the Neutra-Alexander office meant so much to him, because for the first time he would have larger projects. But in the USA, bigness counts: How many skyscrapers have you built? How many people do you have in your office? So residential design, which made him famous all over the world, was simply not of interest in the United States. I think that is my analysis.

In the fall a trip to South America as a speaker for an art conference in Brasília. Of course, we also visited Rio, Sao Paulo. During the convention, he was persuaded to fly to Montevideo and Buenos Aires, where he spoke twice to audiences of 3,000 people. From there, we flew to Venezuela to visit the site of a large residence that is now built. As to myself, I was asked to give my first lecture for the architectural panel in Pasadena, combined with a recital. And the text was "How a Wife Can Help Her Husband," and that was a great success.

WESCHLER: How do you think that those texts would hold up to the feminist critique today?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I don't think it would. [laughter]
I also gave a recital in Ojai and La Jolla. In this year, Germany's Chancellor Theodore Heuss conferred the Great Cross of Merit on him, while Austria conferred the Wilhelm Exner Medal on him.

Nineteen sixty. My 1960 year's letter was written in Hamburg and had again ten pages. This time I will be very brief and not mention several trips to the East Coast and Germany, but only two main events. RJN was invited to participate in a competition for a theater in Düsseldorf, which caused much stress and strain. He won the first prize, but a German architect got the commission. And this made him very unhappy, because he

would have loved to design this.

WESCHLER: Why did that happen, if he got the first prize?

DIONE NEUTRA: Political--political. This seems to be a typical event, because Mies van der Rohe had made a design for the Mannheim theater, and also a German architect got the commission.

WESCHLER: In his case, was there any implication of anti-Semitism, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't think so. I don't think so. He also was informed that Esther McCoy had been commissioned by publisher [George] Braziller to write in his series "Masters of [World] Architecture" a book about Neutra. Before we left for Germany we had a chance to see the manuscript and the photos she had chosen. We had worked for months; we had gone through all our files in the basement; we had been very cooperative. I would like to quote a few sentences from my yearly letter about that:

A grueling day at the publishing house of George Braziller. Only at the publishers' did we have a chance to glance at the manuscript and see what pictures she had finally chosen. Publisher and editor were dismayed at her choice, as were we. Only months later, when we saw her book on five California architects [Five California Architects], did we understand why she wanted to play down the role RJN had played in the development of the modern movement in California and the USA.

WESCHLER: Can you expand on that? What do you mean?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think, you know, that she was Schindler's girl friend, and I think that Schindler was the architect she was really interested in. And so as she had this manuscript which--she was working on this manuscript--she wanted to play up Schindler and Greene and all the other architects and play down Neutra's role.

WESCHLER: Can you describe her a little bit? She's an important architectural historian around here.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Yes. Well, we had many sessions with her, and RJN was also very unhappy with her text, because she completely underplayed his interest in biorealism. And I remember that when he read the text, he wanted to force Braziller to influence her to change it, and he absolutely said, "No, I cannot do that. She is a free agent, she has to write the text as she sees it." And RJN was so upset, I remember we had a meeting-- We had dinner with Braziller at a restaurant, and then we took a taxi and brought him to the last train to Connecticut, where he lived. And Braziller was so angry, he said, "All right, then I'm not going to publish the book." And during the night, RJN thought it over, and he said, "Well, even if I'm not happy with the book, it certainly is more important that it is published than it's not published." So then he made peace with Braziller and agreed to the text.

WESCHLER: Did he make peace with Esther McCoy after that, or did they not have much contact with each other?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't think very much. No. Nineteen sixty-one: this year my yearly letter was fifteen pages long, because we had so many trips east and three trips to Europe. I will mention only some important developments: the competition for a theater in Düsseldorf (that was the second increment); the commission to design two housing projects, one near Frankfurt and one near Hamburg; a residence in Königstein, near Frankfurt, and one in Wuppertal. While flying about, Neutra tried to correct the galley proofs of his autobiography, Life and Shape, which appeared simultaneously in Germany and New York. This meant that at each stop there would be a new batch of galley proofs. He would correct them in the plane and in the train, and on that trip, I didn't see anything, because I spent all the time typing in the hotel all the corrections for these two books.

WESCHLER: In general, when did Neutra write in his daily routine?

DIONE NEUTRA: From four to eight in the morning.

WESCHLER: What time did he go to bed at night?

DIONE NEUTRA: Did I tell you the story of Dion?

WESCHLER: Which story is that?

DIONE NEUTRA: When he was three years old, I heard him say

to a neighbor, "My mother is the greatest liar." So I said, "Dion, how can you say such a thing?" And he said, "Well, you always say that Daddy's not in when you perfectly well know that he is taking a nap." So I said, "Dion, you see, there are situations in life where you have to weigh whom you hurt less. It's simply that you cannot always tell the truth, because if I tell a businessman that your father is asleep at two o'clock, that would make a very bad impression on him; but it doesn't hurt him to tell him that he can call at four o'clock and that your father will be in. But it would hurt your father very much if I would wake him up, because he has to see clients until eleven o'clock at night."

WESCHLER: How long were these naps that he took during the day?

DIONE NEUTRA: Two hours. Then we supervised the residence in Ascona, discussed a second one in Wengen. We flew to Athens as guests of [Constantinos] Doxiadis. We flew to Sicily, and that was a wonderful trip, because all the students--he gave a lecture in Palermo--and all the students of Palermo came with him in three carloads. And I remember that we visited a very important Greek temple--I've forgotten the name now, I may want to look it up--and he made a very interesting discovery, because he

suddenly realized that all these friezes were in color, originally, and how important the color played in this whole scheme of the temple. And one of the students parked where a bus was supposed to park, because RJN kept them so long that they all had to telephone their parents that they were being delayed. Well, the bus came and here was a car, and the bus just stood on his horn, and then the boy came out, the policeman came. And this was so interesting for me to see the difference between Sicily and the United States, because there was a one-hour discussion with the policeman, and the student pleaded with him, he said, "Here is a famous architect, and he kept us so long and I had to go and telephone." And finally he didn't get a ticket. [laughter] I don't think that would have happened in the United States.

On our return, we stopped in Grand Rapids to discuss a residence there, as well as one in Cincinnati. Neutra was asked to submit designs for the Oakland Museum.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And then, you know, the Saarinen associates got the commission. We had one week's vacation driving up the redwood highway as far as Eureka with our youngest son, Raymond, before he entered medical school at McGill University, Montreal. And that was wonderful; we enjoyed that very much. I would do the driving, and

that was at a time where you still had fenders where you could sit on, so I would drive ten miles an hour or five miles an hour, and Mr. Neutra and Raymond would sit on the fenders to be able to see these huge redwood trees, which you cannot see when you're sitting in the car.

[laughter] Then we flew to Germany to discuss a third housing colony near Wiesbaden and a residence for a famous Hungarian conductor, Ferenc^x Fricsay, in Ermatingen. Unfortunately, a year later, while we were discussing the preliminaries, he died of cancer, so it was never built. And a second book was discussed, World and Dwelling, published by Alexander Koch in Stuttgart. On the way home, we visited Raymond in Montreal.

In 1962, my yearly letter had twenty-one pages and is fascinating reading. I will mention only the high points. In March inauguration of the large navy housing project in Lemoore, near Fresno. Supervision visits to Cincinnati, Grand Rapids, Philadelphia, New York. April 8, Neutra's seventieth birthday. A big party at the building center. Hundreds of letters and telegrams, the most surprising one from USSR, and I quote: "Soviet architects congratulate you on your glorious seventieth anniversary and wish you good health and further success in your work for the benefit of the mankind, signed Sharow, Secretary of the Board, USSR Union of Architects." And we don't

know anybody--we did not at that time know anybody in Russia, so we had no idea how this came about. Isn't that interesting?

WESCHLER: Fascinating.

DIONE NEUTRA: Then, also, a most impressive publication in color published in Italy. And the founding of the [Richard J.] Neutra Institute. I will quote a few sentences from the invitation to become a member:

Invitation for you to become a member of the Richard J. Neutra Institute. Control of environmental factors for the betterment of man: this is a large purpose of the Richard J. Neutra Institute. The institute seeks to carry on research and educational programs based on many of the humanistic writings and activities of Mr. Neutra. It contemplates going beyond these into a diverse range of fields but all interestingly relate to its principal theme. Architecture that conforms to all in one man's emotional, physiological, and ecological needs. Anticipatory design, preparatory to lessen per capita space resulting from the population explosion and increasing urbanization; studies of the effects of light, sound, atmospheric content, color et cetera on man; programs to restore and increase the benefits of natural environmental factors; these are some of the fundamental interests of the institute. Our organization also endeavors to communicate the results of its own research and that of other environmental scientists. These will be brought to the attention of the public, community leaders, governmental authorities at all levels, and those principally responsible for planning full communities or developing sections. The broad consumership, the citizenry, must become more informed on these important problems to preserve individual and social vitality.

Now, this-- Later on, there was a branch in Zurich and one in Vienna, and much of Mr. Neutra's activities in '63 up to '66, '68, were consumed with corresponding all over the world, inviting people, inviting scientists, and so on, and it is a nonprofit institute in Sacramento. But there was no money, there was nobody besides Mr. Neutra who was interested to push it, and so it just died. Nothing came of it.

WESCHLER: It had been his idea to found it?

DIONE NEUTRA: It was his idea.

WESCHLER: That was his mission?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was it, yes. In May, a delegation from Die Neue Heimat, one of the biggest housing concerns in Germany, came and brought him a present, a Neutra Ring of Architecture, with his portrait cut in a carnelian stone [carnelian]. And here I should perhaps say that such a ring was started 200 years ago by an actor, Wieland, and after his death, he was supposed to give it to an actor of prominence. And this ring has been wandering from one hand to another for the last 200 years. The idea of this concern was that Mr. Neutra should give this ring, after his death, to an architect of prominence. While he was in Vienna, later on, he had the idea that this ring should be given as a loan every five years, and that there should be an exhibition of biorealistically

interested architects so that the public in Vienna would be introduced to this type of architecture and would become architecturally more conscious. But the Viennese architects were so jealous that nothing ever happened to it. And here, a thief broke into my house and stole the ring, so it is not in existence anymore.

Fly to Frankfurt and Hamburg to see construction of the two Bewobau [Company] housing projects, and the home in Königstein and Wuppertal under construction. A new commission by Gerth Bucerius, publisher of Die Zeit a very big newspaper, to be built in the Italian Alps. We flew to Zurich to discuss the house in Wengen already mentioned. Nineteen sixty-two--

WESCHLER: One question quickly.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Were your finances looking up during this period, or were you still in pretty bad shape?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, the finances were looking up, because, through these big projects in Glendale, we had made savings.

WESCHLER: So during the fifties, it had not been so good, but later on it was--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, later on, during the sixties, it was much better. We had received an invitation to visit for two weeks Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Israel. While we were

in Germany, a telegram from an engineer in Pakistan arrived: could we come right away to Pakistan to discuss a college in East Pakistan? I told my husband, "Richard, that is impossible, because we have to be back for the inauguration of the Gettysburg museum in November, and there's simply not time to fly to Pakistan." My husband looked at me, and he said, "Look, Dione, if somebody sends you two prepaid tickets and offers you a job, there is no such thing as impossible. You go to a travel agency and make it possible." So I spent a whole day at the travel agency, and by cutting off--by allowing only four days in each country, we were able to fly to Pakistan, and the college is built.

And so, a stopover and lecture in Teheran, and this I should perhaps mention, because it is very amusing. While we were visiting our embassy in Pakistan, a lecture had been arranged in Athens on our way back to the United States, but my husband said, "Look, I've been in Athens many times. Is there any other way we can fly?" So I looked up my trip list--I think I mentioned my trip list before--and there I-- There were three names: two architects, whom somebody had mentioned during a lecture, and one architect who had visited us and had said, "If you ever come to Teheran, visit me." So I sent three telegrams and said Richard Neutra could come to Teheran,

would you like him to lecture at the university? Two telegrams came back: one from this architect who said "delighted" and one from the other architect who had become the dean of the architectural school meanwhile. We arrived at three o'clock, and I thought, "Oh, dear me. Who is going to be there?" We had no hotel reservations, nothing. So we waited to be disembarked. Suddenly we heard somebody run up the steps, and a voice said, "Is Mr. Neutra here? Professor Neutra?" We said, "Yes, we are here," so we went ahead, and he said (and this was the architect who had visited us here), "I've hired a villa for you, I have hired a private plane for you, I will take you all over Teheran. But the dean of the architectural school is waiting for you outside. I am a friend of the police chief and so he has allowed me to come here and greet you in the plane. You better say hello to the dean." So while we were walking towards the building, suddenly there was a huge outcry. There were 300 students on the top of the roof awaiting him. And this architect said, "Why don't you wait in the car, and we'll be right back." Well, he didn't come back, he didn't come back; finally he came back alone, and he said, "I'm very sorry, but the dean says he has hired a suite for you at the hotel. You are the guests of the university, I am only a private architect, and I have no right to

invite you." [laughter] That night was Mr. Neutra's first lecture in a thousand-seat auditorium, and I prefaced the lecture again with a cello recital and singing. There was such excitement, and the students just loved Mr. Neutra. It was wonderful.

Of course, a stopover in Istanbul (and that's another story, but that goes too far). Fly to Washington, an invitation to visit Richmond to design the first modern residence in that state (which is now built). Inauguration of the Gettysburg museum. Overnight stay in New York, fly to Dayton, Ohio, to visit the Dayton museum.

Overnight, the next morning, before we flew to Dayton, I suddenly became very ill. I had a shooting pain through my whole body, and by noon, I had 102 [degree] fever. A friend came over to help me pack, and by the time we arrived in Dayton, my foot was so swollen that they had to get a stretcher to bring me to the hotel. And I recognized, with the greatest dismay, that I had for the fourth time erysipelas, which is a very virulent streptococci infection, which I had had three times before. That meant that I was laid up for seven weeks. First I was in Westwood, and my sister took care of me, and then I was for two weeks in a little apartment which Dion had rented, because he had just been divorced. So Mr. Neutra would come every evening and visit me, and at that time,

I could already hop on one foot and could take care of myself. But I suddenly discovered that I am a very contemplative person, that I love to be alone, that I have a very good time all by myself, and here I was married for, at that time, forty years with a man who was always in turmoil.

WESCHLER: What happened with that discovery?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, this comes later. In that year, Neutra worked for a competition for Peugeot in Buenos Aires, for a civic center in Johannesburg, and a flour mill in Malaysia. And a third volume, Buildings and Projects, was published in Zurich. I also should mention that an architect from Germany, Egon Winkens, conducted an evening seminar in the Glendale building that had stood empty for a year--since Alexander had moved downtown--so many architects worked in offices during the day and came in the evening to the seminar.

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AUGUST 18, 1978

WESCHLER: We're in the early sixties and continuing with Mrs. Neutra.

DIONE NEUTRA: So many architects from all over the world wrote letters that they would like to work in Mr. Neutra's office. But, after all, he had now only a very small office with the [four] collaborators: Sergei Koschin, John Blanton, Benno Fisher, and Egon Winkens. So he suggested to them, "Well, if you come to Los Angeles, take a job. And if you want to work in the evening with me, I am willing to teach you." So they worked on the projects which we worked on. And so I think he had a very great influence on many, many architects from all over the world who came. And he would then go in the evening and spend an hour and talk to them.

Nineteen sixty-three. This year my yearly letter had twenty-five pages. March 27 we flew to Cedar Rapids where RJN was invited for a week's symposium, and I, for a full-fledged concert. We arrived at the airport coming from Dayton, where he had supervised his museum, and one of the professors whispered to me, "Your son Dion has called, it's very urgent that you call him back." So I went to the telephone booth while Mr. Neutra was standing outside talking, and Dion said, "Mother, I have very bad news.

Our house had burned down." My first reaction was, now comes a change; now something must, happen because all these years since Alexander had left, Mr. Neutra had been feeling his vitality diminishing, his memory diminishing; and he had tried all sorts of schemes whether he could make his four collaborators take over the office and he would only be a consultant and he could slowly, slowly move back, because Dion was working somewhere else and also had opened his own office. But it didn't work, because these collaborators functioned only when Mr. Neutra was vital and inspirational; that's the way he could hold them together. So I was at times desperate. I didn't know what would happen.

WESCHLER: This, despite the fact that he was doing so much traveling and so forth, he was getting lower and lower in spirits?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. And my second thought was, I'm not going to tell him, because if I tell him now, I'm going to spoil his whole trip. The house is burned, and nothing can be done about it. So I came out of the booth, and he said, "Anything important?" And I said, "No, nothing important." Then I told the professors, "Don't let him read the [newspaper]," and he doesn't listen to the radio and television anyway, and so he didn't know anything about it. All during the week I

dropped mentions, hints of fate, that sometimes terrible things happen, and later on you find out that it's not so bad. But then, when we sat on the plane, I knew I had to tell him. So then I was so pent up that I started to cry, and as I never cry, he was so horrified to see me just sobbing for five minutes, not being able to get over it, that when I finally told him what had happened, he was more concerned about me sobbing than about the house having burned down. [laughter]

WESCHLER: How had the house burned down?

DIONE NEUTRA: A secretary was there until ten o'clock. But somebody told us that our housekeeper had remarked that she smelled rubber, and the fire started in the office which was underneath Mr. Neutra's bedroom. We both would have been burned, because we both slept with wax in our ears, and we wouldn't have heard the crackling at the beginning of the fire. It must have been an electrical short circuit that started it. But all our tapes were there, and when the fire started on the tapes and on all the negatives, then it just exploded and raced up towards the kitchen.

WESCHLER: You said tapes of the speeches you made?

DIONE NEUTRA: Tapes of speeches.

WESCHLER: And negatives of photographs?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, and all the negatives of photographs

and, of course, correspondence and-- It was pretty awful.

WESCHLER: What was salvaged? Let's do a little inventory of what was lost and what salvaged.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Dion's first wife, Viki, lived in back of our house, and she phoned him. He lived then in his apartment a block away, and he immediately came, and the fire department was more interested to save the little dinky houses on the side than our own house, because it was just in flames. But Dion told them to direct their stream of water into my room upstairs, which was full of photographs and also negatives and slides. So very much of that was saved.

WESCHLER: Had he not directed that, it would have been burnt?

DIONE NEUTRA: That would have happened, that's right. And the housekeeper woke up, and the house was in flames already. She ran down and woke up our two apprentices, Gerhard and Ute Lehmann from Germany, who had lived with us for a year, and who had been very helpful and had lifted Mr. Neutra's spirits during all this difficult time, because they were ready to listen, they were ready to work long hours, and they were just what the doctor prescribed for him; while our old collaborators were jaded and so accustomed to him that the bloom had worn off of the relationship. So they, Ute and Gerhard, they

took out the files, and they tried to save as much as possible, because that part--by that time, that part of the building had not been as badly burned as the living room and the upper part. But, of course, all the books and all the clipping books-- Later on we retrieved the clipping books, because they were so thick they didn't burn. The firemen threw everything out of the building-- furniture and everything which was burning. So then the next day our office staff came, and they just tried to salvage what they could. There is a very terrible photograph of Mr. Neutra standing in the ruins looking at all these things.

WESCHLER: The stuff that's at UCLA today in the Neutra Archive at UCLA, was that already there?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, that was already there about 1955.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. And the garden house was not burned. The fire broke the glass, and by the time we came, Dion had ordered a glass man and the glass was there. So we lived there for a few weeks, but it was so horrible to see that burned-out shell in front of us that we were able to get a lovely apartment right near where Dion lived, beside Dion, and RJN started immediately to redraw--to make plans for the redrawing. And we had a terrible time to involve Dion, because he was working elsewhere.

WESCHLER: Before we get to that, let's get back to the plane. He's still concerned about what happened then. You mentioned that you were on the plane, and he was more concerned about you.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: What happened that night? Did you then come from the airport?

DIONE NEUTRA: That night we came, Dion picked us up and we went, of course, to see the house, and walked through the house, and it was a terrible thing. Should I talk more about this now?

WESCHLER: Yeah.

DIONE NEUTRA: And then Raymond, who was in Montreal, wrote us two marvelous letters saying how he felt and how important it was, he thought, that RJN should put all his concentration to rebuild this house, because he felt that just this--that might become a little jewel and show everything which he could do. And then for weeks and weeks this thing just lingered on, and then-- Now I have to go back to my notes.

While we were living in this little apartment, we received a delegation of Rumanian architects in April who invited us to come to Rumania in July. In May we flew to Europe to supervise our various Swiss residences and in June participated in a conference in Vienna. Then we

visited Czechoslovakia, a lecture in Prague, lecture in Budapest, lecture in Warsaw, lecture in Bucharest, Rumania, and we visited Mamaia, Constanta, at the Black Sea. And Neutra was invited to be the main speaker for the Deutsche Kultur Kreis, a very important organization of all German industrialists in Goslar, which is a charming old German town. Wherever we were, Mr. Neutra made sketches, travel sketches, and I have hundreds of his travel sketches. He loved to sketch; that was one of his recreations. Then, while we were in Europe, we received an invitation to lecture at the Pan American Congress in Mexico. We accepted this, because it gave us a chance to fly by way of Caracas and supervise the large residence built there.

WESCHLER: You mentioned earlier that when you first heard of the fire, you were convinced that this would mean a change.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Was there a change, do you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: A complete change.

WESCHLER: How so?

DIONE NEUTRA: I come to that. While we were in Europe, my sister informed me that we could purchase a charming little Neutra house a block away from our Silver Lake house. And we did that while she telephoned us. And we spent

three very happy years in that little house.

WESCHLER: What address is that, do you remember?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was 2440 Earl Street. And this was a house built for a bachelor. He came to Mr. Neutra and said, "I want to build a house for sale." Mr. Neutra said, "I cannot do that. [laughter] We have to invent a client, and why don't we invent-- What is the difficulty with most houses? They are designed for small children, and when the children are grown up, and the parents keep on living in that house, and they come back with their grandchildren, the grandchildren make noise, and the grandparents haven't any peace, and they are glad when the grandchildren are gone again. So why don't we build a three-generation house?" So he built-- And this was a very small house, but he put the master bedroom with a very beautiful divided lavatory and bathroom and toilet division, then a very large living room, then a breakfast room, then a kitchen, and in back of that, two small rooms for the visiting grandchildren, and a patio.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: So this is the house that we purchased. Hardly home, we had to fly east again for the inauguration of the Swirbul Library of Adelphi College, where Neutra was also given an honorary doctor's degree. On the way home, we made many stops to visit various buildings under

construction. And I finally made a record. And here is the record--

WESCHLER: I see. My goodness.

DIONE NEUTRA: --where John Nesbitt spoke the introduction for it. After my long illness and my realization that I was a contemplative nature, I had a few difficult months in 1964 because the office was not in the house anymore, and the distance to the Glendale office was very cumbersome. It was a very, very strenuous time we had then.

Then I had a revelation, and I want to read a paragraph from my yearly letter.

For the first few months, when I still was laboring with the notion that after the fire, after forty-two years of marriage, after discovering my contemplative nature, I should be entitled to a more peaceful existence, I suddenly had a revelation: namely, that as long as I was married to Richard Neutra, as long as I loved him and wanted to help him, why did I expect to have an easier life? Was I going to change him at this late stage? How foolish of me. Dione, just forget all this nonsense: wanting to have leisure, more time to yourself, more time for music. Go on as you have before, and you will feel much better.

After talking to myself this way, stopping to feel sorry for myself, I suddenly did feel better, and have again resumed my active life. I am fortunately blessed with such good health that I am rarely tired. That my husband tells me daily what a miracle woman I am helps me too, of course. Traveling so much, witnessing the enthusiasm of his audiences, of the young architects and students all around the

globe, makes me realize that we are indeed fulfilling a mission, that our life is somehow a legend, an example for many young people who dimly realize that it is possible to live a noncommercial life, to stick to an ideal, not to vacillate, and even be successful and become famous on top of it. Why should one expect that such a life should be easy and comfortable?

[laughter]

WESCHLER: This is in your letter that you mailed out to your friends, in 1964?

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right, yes. Let me see. This year we had several trips to the East Coast, to Germany, Switzerland, and even lectures in East Germany, France, Holland, Ireland, England, and witnessed, in December, the wedding of our youngest son, Raymond, in Canada, in Montreal.

Nineteen sixty-five. Again a trip to Europe, visiting our clients on the way, an honorary doctor's degree in Rome, discussion of a housing project in Rome. A lecture in Tunis. An audience with President [Habib] Bourguiba was very interesting. At first they didn't want to let me come in, but then they let me. And it was in a marvelous palace with Moorish architecture and all sorts of servants, you know, swirling around. And we were given Coca-Cola. [laughter]

WESCHLER: That's a great luxury.

DIONE NEUTRA: As American visitors. My diary notes say:

Our travel itinerary looked like this: New York, Binghamton, New York, Princeton, Philadelphia, Washington, New York, Zurich, Wengen, Ascona, Milano, Rome, Tunis, Rome, Lausanne, Basel, Baden, Zurich, Frankfurt, Wuppertal, Paris, New York, Chicago, Dayton, Los Angeles--in each place, either a client, a prospect, a lecture. Checking my pocket notebook mail charge-out sheets, I notice that I wrote ninety-eight letters, not mentioning the dictabelts I sent home to be typed. I had a travel dictaphone [dictabelts, how do you call it? Dictabelts] along and eighty-six postal cards. It has been a rich and varied fare. We have been happy in the enthusiasm and thankfulness of our clients. It was wonderful to see with what patience and inspiring insight RJN listened to their requests and tried to satisfy their longings.

WESCHLER: Can you estimate the productivity of these years compared to earlier years? Was he doing as many houses as he had done, or fewer, or--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, many more.

WESCHLER: You say more than he had done, and at the same time, he was doing all this traveling as well.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Meanwhile, everybody worked in the office and sent us drawings on our trips; drawings were sent, he corrected them, sent them back. Letters were answered. I mean, this whole thing went on.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: When we had these long, long trips, sometimes twenty-two hours in a plane, I would just keep on typing and typing and typing, and other people would be sleeping,

other people would be reading the magazines, Mr. Neutra would give me what he wrote, I would pin it in front of me on the seat, and then I would type on my knees. Finally the hostesses would come and say, "For heaven's sake, what are you doing?" And Mr. Neutra always had his Time cover along; so he would show them the Time cover, and they would be very excited and show it to the pilots, you know, and then we would be treated very especially.

[laughter]

WESCHLER: How do you feel, in general, about the quality of the work of that period compared to the quality of former houses?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, I think it was very good. I think it was very good, because, after all, our collaborators had worked for so many years, you know, that they would be able to do it, and whenever Mr. Neutra came on a supervision visit, he was able to put the artistic touches on it, which was very important.

"A wire from President Johnson to come to Washington for the signing of the Arts and Humanities Bill." And he got a pen with his name. I could not be present, but I was present at a cocktail party arranged by [Hubert] Humphrey. I should perhaps mention that Humphrey had become a very good friend of ours. We had, on our first visit, oh, many years ago, twenty years ago-- He became so fascinated with what Mr. Neutra told him that he

ordered a lunch, and we spent three hours in his quarters. And he also wanted to introduce him to Senator Morse, because he also saw the likeness of both men. And we have many letters from him.

WESCHLER: Did you meet Senator Morse?

DIONE NEUTRA: We met Senator Morse.

WESCHLER: Did they recognize themselves in each other?

DIONE NEUTRA: I guess they laughed. [laughter] I think Mr. Neutra was much better looking.

WESCHLER: Would you describe yourself during the sixties as a Humphrey Democrat?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Yes, we were. The rest of the year was most distressing, as our office situation was in disarray: because it became ever more clear that we could not go on; because the people were quarreling with each other; Mr. Neutra's presence, his inspiration--to hear his voice was not there anymore, and it was very cumbersome to bring the drawings from Glendale and bring them back to the little house. Then Dion told us that he had to sign a lease for his office for five years, and also a big hospital project, which was the reason for his starting his own office, had collapsed. And so I told him, I said, "Why don't you rent a room in the Glendale office?" And while we were on all these trips, we asked him to be so kind and have a look at what was happening in the

Glendale office. And he wrote many letters and said, "This is absolutely awful. This is a country club. These people come and go, I mean, there's absolutely no order in this office. I think I would like to become your partner now and make order there." But he-- Then we received letters from the office saying, "What's the matter with Dion? How come that he's suddenly here now and giving directives to us? What is his role?"

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at the request of the interviewee.]

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Now I'm covering the years 1960 to 1970. My yearly letter for 1966 consisted of one page, and was written in East Germany, because Mr. Neutra was discussing the book Survival Through Design, which was going to appear in the socialist edition, with Hermann Exner. And so we lived for three months in Grünau, which is near East Berlin, and I had no secretary, I had no means of duplicating this letter. But I want to quote one passage from this one page.

Despite so many difficulties, we were able to escape for six glorious months. Starting in May, we first flew to Edinburgh, were driven through the Highlands, flew to Switzerland to consult with two clients, to France to discuss a new residence for Lille, which is now built, discussions with two clients in Germany; as in Edinburgh, lectures in Goteborg and

and Stockholm. A most wonderful ten days in Finland. Star lecturer at the summer festival. Much impressed with Finland's architecture. RJN had a sauna with Alvar Aalto on his summer island. Lectures in Moscow and Leningrad, that's a long story. Happy to find such enthusiastic response.

I could perhaps tell that while we were in Leningrad, we were standing at the Neva River while Mr. Neutra was making a sketch; we noticed a young man looking at us and smiling at us. So I went up to him, and I said, "Do you understand English?" And he said yes. He said, "Are you Englishmen?" I said, "No, we're Americans." "Oh," he said, "I just saw an exhibition of modern architecture from New York at the Museum of Modern Art in Leningrad." So my husband said, "Oh? There was a very large photograph of a house of mine in the desert." So he said, "What is your name?" So he said, "Neutra." "Oh, yes," he said, "I remember that residence." [laughter]

Flight through Germany, Switzerland, Italy to Tunisia and Libya, back to Rome to catch the flight to Johannesburg, South Africa. Guest of the South African Foundation. Being shown what the government does in housing, buildings, schools and universities for their black and colored populations in Pretoria, Durbin, and Capetown. Fly to Mozambique, Rhodesia, Victoria Falls, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, West and East Pakistan, Nepal, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Lebanon. So much friendship, so much enthusiasm for RJN's ideas, so much hospitality. It was a heartwarming experience, and you can imagine how much I could tell of all we saw, not as tourists, but being taken around by most intelligent men and women from various walks of life, from whom we gleaned and tried to understand how different each country's problems are, how falsely our newspapers report, and how rich we feel as citizens of the world.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Neutra's spirits during those last five, ten years.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, as soon as we were home, he was in despair. All the time, every day, all these difficulties, the quarrels between the secretaries, the quarrels between the various draftsmen, trying to mediate, and his realization that he just couldn't manage it anymore. It was very difficult. And only during these trips were we really happy with each other.

WESCHLER: And how had he reacted, over the long term, to the burning of the house?

DIONE NEUTRA: We both really felt that we would not like to go back to the house, because we were so happy in this little Earl Street house. After we came back from Africa, we flew to West Berlin where Neutra had a thorough checkup. Our physician friend told us that RJN had one year to live if he did not change his life-style. We had received so many letters-- I should mention that meanwhile the house had been completed and used as the institute headquarters where meetings were held, arranged by [Dorothy Serulnic] our secretary for many, many years, who had really kept the whole thing together; Dion could not get along with her at all. He had moved to the little garden house when he married and started his family.

WESCHLER: The little house behind here?

DIONE NEUTRA: The little house in the back.

WESCHLER: Right.

DIONE NEUTRA: And I should mention that our draftsmen were incapable to finish the drawings of our house, so Dion took over, and he pulled everything together. You know, this was a research house. There were many offers from all sorts of companies as far as Japan who wanted to contribute and give materials. So Dion had to coordinate all of this. He also, living in the back, he supervised everything and was every day on the job. And because we were in Europe for three years during the rebuilding, he was really responsible for all the fine details of the working plans, which he did. I can visualize how disagreeable it must have been for him and his family to live for two years in all the noise, and I am very grateful how he designed the house and I daily enjoy his beautiful detailing.

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at the request of the interviewee.]

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I will not
comment on the three years, as time is running out.
We returned, 1969, to witness a big Neutra exhibition
at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

WESCHLER: Just basically, you lived in Europe in one
general area during those three years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, we mostly lived in Vienna. Perhaps
I should mention that for his seventy-fifth birthday the--
I think I mentioned that already--that the mayor opened
the exhibition.

WESCHLER: I think you did.

DIONE NEUTRA: I think I've mentioned that. Yes. And
that made us decide to stay then in Vienna. But Mr. Neutra
felt that he should give all-- Everything which he had
learned he wanted now to give to his home town. But the
architects in Vienna were so jealous of him, they were
so afraid that the city might commission him to build

something, that he was not even invited to lecture at his alma mater; he was completely ignored. And so when we heard that UCLA wanted to confer an honorary doctor's degree on Mr. Neutra--but he had to be present himself--we decided to come back.

WESCHLER: You had initially intended to stay there permanently, did you think?

DIONE NEUTRA: We probably would have stayed there permanently. And when we came back and lived in this beautiful house, after having lived in crummy quarters in Europe--

WESCHLER: What kind of quarters had you lived in?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, just one room, you know, just miserable quarters. I told my husband, I said, "Look, Richard, I mean, it's crazy. Here is this beautiful house standing empty. I have to try to find American-speaking secretaries in Vienna. It's just simply impossible. We just must come to grips with Dion and see how we can arrange ourselves." And so, first there was this exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, a very important and beautiful exhibition; and then Oxford University Press had published a paperback called Survival Through Design, 1968, and they were jubilant, because the army had bought the first edition to be sent in their book packages to Vietnam. So that was a triumph for us.

In 1969, Mr. Neutra taught for a semester at Cal Poly, Pomona. And in 1970, he was invited to be the main speaker at the bathing facility congress in Sindelfingen, near Stuttgart. And months later, while photographing one of his houses in Wuppertal, he had a heart attack and died April 16. And now I would like to end this session by quoting a passage of a letter he wrote to my mother about me in 1927.

WESCHLER: Before we do that, let me ask you a few questions, and then we'll end the session with that.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK, fine.

WESCHLER: When he came back to Los Angeles during '69, '70, was there more peace, or was it a difficult year?

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at the request of the interviewee.]

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WESCHLER: Let me ask some other questions about the time in Los Angeles--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --before you went back to Europe. Well, first of all, just generally, I'm still not quite clear--you

mentioned that after the fire there was a great change in Neutra. Can you describe what that change was?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, the change was, you know, for thirty years we lived in this house, he had meetings with his draftsmen. He would not go to the office anymore after these two heart attacks, but they would come up to his room and he would talk to them. When he was at Earl Street, there was no communication anymore. I mean, they hardly ever saw him, so his whole thing fizzled out.

WESCHLER: And was that also true in the years in Europe, '66-'69. Was that a relatively low level of communication?

DIONE NEUTRA: Very low level. Of course, there is a tremendous correspondence, because Dion then took over the office, and he handled all the jobs which were running.

[phone rings--tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER: We were just talking-- Well, let's go back a step. We were talking about the low level of activity in Vienna when you were living there, but you were getting a large correspondence.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. Yes. Yes.

WESCHLER: He was not doing that many residences in Europe for Europeans during that time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. He was building a second house in Wuppertal. And he was building the house in France.

WESCHLER: But it was not quite as--nowhere near as--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no.

WESCHLER: Was he happy, in Europe during those years, outside of the Viennese?

DIONE NEUTRA: We had a very happy time. There was one man, Heinz Krewinkel, who was the editor of DLW [Deutsche Linoleum Werke], which is the linoleum company magazine, which was a very artistic magazine. And he invited us twice to come for four lectures to Germany. He republished Wie Baut Amerika?, and every participant at this lecture got a copy of that book, and RJN would autograph it. We bought a car, and we would drive to these various cities, and that was absolutely wonderful, because all these architects--there were audiences up to 1,500--they were so excited to meet Mr. Neutra and were so happy to see him, and this was, of course, a colossal lift for him. And then the second year, he republished Neues Bauen in der Welt, and again these people got a present of it.

WESCHLER: I see. One of the sort of things that was going on in Los Angeles during that time, or sometime during the sixties, I have mentioned that I wanted to ask you about was this drive-in church.

DIONE NEUTRA: Garden Grove [Community] Church. Dion was the supervisor for the Tower of Hope, which was built ten years later, after the church, and that was built while we were in Europe.

WESCHLER: Can you describe-- That's a legend in Los Angeles. People talk about Los Angeles as a crazy city: it's so crazy it has a drive-in church. What was the origin of that?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, Reverend [Robert] Schuller had just been ordained minister and came with his young bride to Orange County. And he was a Lutheran, and he tried to find whether there were any Lutherans living in Orange County, but there were hardly any. He had no church. So he hired a drive-in theater and hired a harmonium, and his wife would play it on the roof of the drive-in theater. He left in all the surrounding mailboxes a notice that he was going to preach. So people were very curious to hear somebody preach in an open-air theater. He is a magnificent speaker, so in the shortest time he had a very large congregation. And he conceived the idea of writing a letter to Vincent Peale in New York telling him that he could get him an audience of 25,000 people if he would come and preach in his drive-in theater--which he did, and he provided this audience. Well, then he came to Mr. Neutra and said that he would like to design a church for 1,000 people inside and 500 people parked outside.

WESCHLER: Why did he come to Neutra?

DIONE NEUTRA: That I don't remember. Well, Mr. Neutra was at that time a famous architect.

WESCHLER: In a way that--

DIONE NEUTRA: And this concept of inside-out and nature-near appealed to him.

WESCHLER: And was Schuller very familiar with architecture?

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes, he was quite familiar.

WESCHLER: He had studied it with this in mind?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, with that in mind.

WESCHLER: Can you describe their meeting, what Neutra thought of his idea.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, I don't remember this first meeting. I don't remember this first meeting.

WESCHLER: Did he find it at all strange, the idea of having a drive-in church?

DIONE NEUTRA: He was very intrigued by it. And Schuller explained to him, he said, "You know, there are many, many sick people who find it is difficult to get in and out of a car, and many business people who would not like to get dressed again on Sunday, who would like to work in the garden or paint the house or do something; but they could just go in their work clothes, hop in the car, take the children along, wouldn't have to have a babysitter." And so this seemed to be a very good idea.

WESCHLER: It's biorealism for a Los Angeles environment.

DIONE NEUTRA: For a Los Angeles environment, because nobody walks to the church, everybody comes in the car already. Of course there was a parking place for people who wanted to

be inside the church. And so Mr. Neutra provided a large sliding-glass panel, and when Reverend Schuller came on the podium, he would press a button and the glass panel would slide aside, and all the fountains on the water strip along the glass front of the church, the fountains would tone down, and the whole audience could see him; and they, of course, could hear it through the loudspeaker, like in a drive-in theater.

WESCHLER: How did the architectural community as a whole react to this project?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, for instance, when we showed the slides of this church in Europe, they were absolutely horrified: "That is not a church!" Also, Mr. Neutra conceived the idea that churches were modeled after the caves of the Christians who had to meet in the catacombs in order to get away from persecution. But he felt that God was nature, and so he wanted to build a church open to nature.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. So was there a lot of publicity as that church was going up in terms of Neutra as the architect?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, it also won a prize for the best steel construction.

WESCHLER: Really?

DIONE NEUTRA: From Bethlehem Steel.

WESCHLER: So it was a project which he took very seriously, even though it has a whimsical reputation today.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, no. He took it very seriously.

WESCHLER: You are aware that Philip Johnson is now doing [the Crystal Cathedral].

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I know that. I know that. Dion's very bitter because Reverend Schuller had asked Dion to make designs; but then he met Philip Johnson, and he never even looked at Dion's designs, didn't pay for them either. So--

WESCHLER: I see. One other set of questions (we'll go over if we run out of tape)--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --concerns the fact that in the sixties--and even more in the seventies now--but at the beginning of the sixties there was the beginning of a kind of antimodernist movement in architecture, or not necessarily antimodernist but more eclectic, and I'm thinking of people like Venturi.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: Did Neutra have feelings with regard to this kind of ebbing of modernism?

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, he felt sad about it. He felt sad that, you know, his ideas that architects should use the findings of the human biologists and physiologists in their designs, and should put the human being in the center of their designs, was ignored. But this was simply unknown

in America.

WESCHLER: And yet there was a surge of modernist construction in Los Angeles, for instance, of people that were very much influenced by Neutra.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. At that time, yes, but not later on.

WESCHLER: But not later on? Was he bitter? Could he see the change as a kind of change in taste and so forth and not necessarily a rejection but just time passing and people having a different set of tastes? Or was it something that he--

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't remember that he really particularly spoke about that. You know, I didn't mention that in these interviews.

TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 18, 1978

WESCHLER: We are concluding the session of August 18, 1978, which will be the last session before we do the video-tape. You were just saying that while you were in Europe he was working on another manuscript.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that was really the main activity, because he was not an architect anymore: he became a writer. And he wrote a manuscript which he called Man in the Middle. And we discussed this, of course, on our walks together, and he looked at life, how it is housed from the birth clinic to the funeral parlor: do all these activities which are being housed, did the architects design it from a biorealistic point of view or from "how cheaply can I build per square foot?" The last year we were here, he rewrote it again and labored over it, but he was not happy and said, "I am happy. I enjoy talking with my clients. I am happy to be an architect, and writing is just a side issue with me." But to be an author all day long didn't appeal to him. So on our walks together he would say so many times, "I wish I was dead, then everything would be easier for you." And I had to say to myself, "Yes, it would be." It was really very sad.

WESCHLER: How do you think he saw his own accomplishment

at the end of his life, looking back over his work?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I think he felt that he had a much greater influence than is really known. I'm sure that Tom Hines will be able to show that in his book.

WESCHLER: Do you think that he felt that the tradition that he represented of modernism and the international style, to some extent, and some of these other things were still strong and vibrant and would continue, or was he worried about that?

DIONE NEUTRA: He felt that-- Everybody had told him that he was so far ahead of his time that these ideas, his ideas, are only very slowly now developing. And I think maybe in fifty years from now they will be very much more prevalent, because he felt the more densely people have to live together, the more important it will be to really know how a human being clicks and what makes him happy or unhappy in order to preserve his sanity. And he felt that all these crimes and [the fact that] one in ten persons have to go through psychiatric treatments in USA, that this had something to do with the environment we are living in.

WESCHLER: Finally, the actual circumstances of his death. You had returned to Europe, you mentioned.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: Was there any particular stress or strain going

on at that time in Europe that he had the heart attack, or was that just--

DIONE NEUTRA: No, he really died, because he had an altercation with his clients, because this particular client, he had built a house that was the first house he was going to build in Germany. And at that time he had, of course, no idea what would be involved to build a house in Europe, and so his agreement letter was perhaps not as clear, legally, as it could be. Anyway, he expected to get 10 percent of the cost of the house as he did here. And for years he would go there and give them advice on landscaping, he would give them advice on furniture placement, and he would always think, "Well, when the house is finished, then they're going to pay me 10 percent." Well, they only paid him 6 percent. And he thought that was so unjust that with all the devotion he had given to them that they paid out all the other people and would not pay him, although he had to make a living, too. So that he finally, on this last visit, he thought he must once talk with them about it. Well, apparently, he got so excited--I was not present, I was at the other house--he got so excited that he took one nitroglycerin after the other, and at the same time, they gave him cocktails. And my sister told me that this combination of alcohol and nitroglycerin was just fatal. And so

he suddenly collapsed and was dead when I came.

WESCHLER: He was already dead when you arrived.

DIONE NEUTRA: He was dead. And when I saw him lying on the floor, I said to myself, "You have been a Sunday child up to the last," because he was so afraid, you know, to lose his capacities, to lose his memory, to be a burden to me, and all that now was gone. And I was absolutely prepared for it, because for twenty years he had told me he was going to die. And so I told myself, "One day it's going to happen." So when I came home alone to this house, I said to myself, "Now what are you going to do with the end of your life?" And so I decided-- I remembered the sentence which he had told me when I was eighteen, "Happiness is to fulfill your own potentials"; so I decided now my time had come, and I was going to fulfill my own potentials.

WESCHLER: We'll talk more about that on the videotape a little bit, and we'll even see a little evidence of that. But perhaps you can read for us the thing you wanted to read.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. This letter he wrote to my mother in 1927, and it reflects my concern at that time, living together with the Schindlers, because Mrs. Schindler was such an intellectual woman and was such a good talker. So this is what he writes:

Dione is a wonderful human being. Although others may value her qualities, nobody, strangely enough, has the slightest inkling of our relationship. Her intelligence is far removed from any dialectic, and to outsiders it seems understandable that I do not have the slightest wish for clever talky-talk. Dione never puts up a hypothesis just to test it. As little as a walnut tree would try as a test to simulate wisteria blossoms, she does not twaddle, and she does not wrap herself into mysterious taciturnity. I do not blame her for her weakness to admire me, the less so as it is not my external success she admires.

And now at the end I would like to quote a page from my diary, April 14, 1951:

This a very appropriate day to start a new book and a new page in my diary. Today I am fifty years old. Does this mean anything to me? Not at all. I do not feel old. I do not look old. I do not think old. And anyway, who says that fifty years is old? We drove yesterday to Santa Barbara where Schulman took pictures of the Tremaine house for Holiday magazine. While driving out, we talked about sudden death [and here I should interrupt and say that was two years after his first heart attack and, you know, he thought he was going to die soon. And I continue] and what to do about it. Richard thought we should go on as now. [Here I interrupt again; that means, I should continue with our collaborators and help them.] But when he pressed me what I would like to do, I told him I would like to perfect my singing. He was quite taken aback and said that it was too bad that I should have to wait for his death in order to fulfill my ambition. He came to this subject again when we were driving home. I told him how I felt about it. I would much rather be Mrs. Richard Neutra and help him than [be] the world's most famous singer and not have had this experience. I hope he lives for a long time, even if it means for me to never fulfill my desire, because it is impossible to be married to

him and to be devoted to music. The picture is very much changed in case of his death, and although I enjoy what I am doing now and would still do it, I would not do it exclusively. I have been a very blessed and happy woman, and it is certainly rare to find a husband who is so delighted with his wife after twenty-nine years of marriage.

WESCHLER: And after much longer.

DIONE NEUTRA: At that time.

WESCHLER: OK, we'll stop for today--

DIONE NEUTRA: OK.

WESCHLER: --and get a little look at you actually singing, at last.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. [laughter]

TAPE NUMBER: XI, [video session]

SEPTEMBER 1, 1978

[Cello music]

WESCHLER: We're here at the Research House, 2300 Silver Lake, designed by the architect Richard Neutra, and we're talking with his widow, Mrs. Dione Neutra. In addition to architecture, music has been a large part of your life, and--

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes.

WESCHLER: --we might begin by talking a little about that.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. Maybe I should start with my father. He was an engineer, but he was especially a very excellent amateur pianist. And so I started piano lessons at the age of six. And then, at the age of fourteen, I got a cello as a birthday present, because he needed a cellist for his chamber music ensemble. Of course, that was many, many years later on, but he, anyway, hoped that I could play with him. And then, much later, I was in Berlin once, and people wanted me to sing, and there was no piano; so I strummed on the cello, and some of the people who were there said, "Oh, Mrs. Neutra, your voice and the cello [together] just sounds beautiful!" So I started to invent accompaniments to many of the folk songs which I know. At first I forgot to breathe, then I forgot

to move the bow; but now I've done it for a long time, and so it seems to be easy.

WESCHLER: Are you aware of anyone else who does this?

DIONE NEUTRA: I don't think I know anybody else who does it. And because I was so busy helping my husband, I had very little time to practice. He gave me a typewriter as a betrothal present, and I learned to type as a wedding present, and so I became his chief secretary and he would never travel without me. Later in his life, he was invited to Asia and Africa and Japan and Russia and Finland and all over Europe and the United States, and wherever we were picked up from the airport, his first question would be, "Do you have a cello? I think you would enjoy hearing my wife sing and play." So then they would arrange, and I would sing either before a lecture or after a lecture or at the reception, and in this way I kept in training.

WESCHLER: Well, can you perhaps play some for us today?

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. I will sing you an old English folk song, "Have You Ever Seen a White Lily Grow?" [music]
And now I will sing a German folk song from the fourteenth century. And I would like for you to imagine that you are in Bethlehem and looking into the manger where the little Jesus baby has just been born. Maria asks Joseph, "Please, rock him for a little while. God will be very pleased about it." [music]

That's bad. I will sing a Swiss song. This is a song about spring in Switzerland. [music]

WESCHLER: Thank you.

DIONE NEUTRA: And now I will play the first movement of the G Major Suite by Bach. [music]

WESCHLER: Mrs. Neutra, can you talk to us a little bit about how you had the time to keep up your cello and singing and so forth during your years of marriage with Richard?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I had no time whatsoever. I only kept it up because I played these cello songs, but I had hardly ever time to practice.

And then when my husband died, in 1970-- Perhaps I should mention that when I was eighteen, I took a walk with him, and he told me, "Happiness is to fulfill your own potential." And that made a very big impression on me. I helped him for forty-eight years to fulfill his potential, because I think that was more important than my music; but then, when he died and I came back alone here--he died in Germany--I said to myself, "Now my time has come and I will fulfill my own potentials."

So, I started to take again cello lessons and singing lessons, and I've been practicing four hours a day, and once a year I give a concert here; and every second year I go to Europe, in one hand my cello and in my other hand

my suitcase. I sing for all my friends and very often also sing publicly.

Now I would like to sing a piano song. And that is in memory of my husband, because every time when we passed a cathedral anywhere in the world, we would enter it, and then he would say, "Dione, sing." And I would say, "Ah, so many people." He said, "Close your eyes. Then you won't see them." And so I would start to sing a Bach song, and that's what I'm going to do now. I will sing a song from Anna Magdalena Bach's book called "Komm Süsser Tod, Komm Selige Ruh" ("Come Sweet Death, Come Heavenly Peace"). [piano and song] [applause]

* * *

WESCHLER: Mrs. Neutra, we've just looked at a table that's filled with books about your husband's architecture, and it occurs to me that we are in one of his most famous buildings right now, his own home. Perhaps you could talk a little bit about its origins.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. He conceived the idea for this house in 1932 and found a lot without any trees on it facing Silver Lake, sixty by seventy feet, and he conceived the idea of housing three families in this house, with separate entrances and complete privacy. And he also used new materials, and old materials in a new way. And then in

1963, the house burned down and had to be completely resurrected. At that time, my son Dion had grown up and had become an architect, and he and his father designed a house. And at that time, all the materials, which were new at that time, thirty years later were available; so the main emphasis was on the feeling of space produced through mirrors and water. For instance, what you see, this room here used to be the drafting room and was full of drafting tables and cabinets and so on, and now it has become my music room. And the wall which you see in the back here is the end of the property.

WESCHLER: Clearly one of the most incredible things about being here is the sense of space on all sides, and the idea that at one time there was an office plus three families living on a lot that is sixty by seventy is one of the great breakthroughs that he made with this house.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, I think he did. But now, through the reconstruction--it's basically on the same foundations, but, for instance, the windows are changed here, because while the drafting tables were here, the windows were only half-height.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh.

DIONE NEUTRA: And later on, the living room upstairs is exactly as it was before.

WESCHLER: Can you re-create this room for us when there

were drafting tables: what kinds of activity was going on here, how many people were in the room?

DIONE NEUTRA: This used to be a wall here, and now there are sliding doors. I think we could not accommodate more than about ten people in here.

WESCHLER: But there were ten people in addition to three families?

DIONE NEUTRA: No, no. No, no, no. There was a possibility for three families to live here--

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: --because I have a kitchen and two bathrooms down here, I have a kitchen upstairs, and a bathroom, and I have a garden house with a separate entrance in the rear.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: So theoretically, three families could live here, but at the moment I live here by myself.

WESCHLER: OK. Maybe we can go upstairs and take a look at what the house looks like up there.

DIONE NEUTRA: OK. And maybe I should say something about all the books here.

* * *

WESCHLER: Well, now we're on the second story of the Research House, starting with the same tree we left in

our last image. And one of the great things about being up here is the sense of being on ground level, as we were saying before. You were telling me that this is pretty much exactly the same as the original house before it burned down, this story up here.

DIONE NEUTRA: This room, the living room, is exactly the same, except the sliding doors used to be market doors, which were folding, because at that time there were no sliding doors; you know, my husband was the first one to introduce sliding doors in this country.

WESCHLER: I see.

DIONE NEUTRA: But this front is exactly the same.

WESCHLER: With the windows that we've just been looking at.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, but there was no greenery; we planted all the trees. There was not one tree around here. The boulevard green was just grass, and we planted the trees outside, the boulevard green, and I keep them clipped, so I don't see the street and can see the lake.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. One thing that has definitely changed since 1933 is the hill over beyond the lake.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. There were hardly any houses whatsoever. There was a big sign, Moreno Highlands, because the actor [Antonio] Moreno lived there. [laughter]

WESCHLER: Can you tell us a little of the history of

the neighborhood here. You've been a longtime resident. How has the neighborhood changed?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, the neighborhood has hardly changed at all. The great shock for us was that the Silver Lake went up to the fence.

WESCHLER: The lake itself?

DIONE NEUTRA: The lake itself. And I still remember the ecstasy, when you came on Sunset Boulevard, you came up on the rise; then, on a clear day, you saw the mountains and you saw the lake, and it was a breathtaking view. Then, in 1955, the water and power department decided that this was a stagnant cove, so they filled it in. They made a jeep road, they made an embankment so that now, when you came up from Sunset Boulevard, you see the embankment and you don't see the lake, you don't see the mountains. And I think that is very sad.

WESCHLER: Did you protest against that at the time?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, yes. There were big protest meetings of all the citizens around the lake; but each one who had a different view on the lake had a different opinion what should be done, so they couldn't agree. And so the water and power department simply went ahead and did what they pleased.

WESCHLER: But in any case, the effect is today very different than what it initially was--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, very much.

WESCHLER: --looking out your window?

DIONE NEUTRA: Very much so. But all our neighbors--
On the other side of Silver Lake Boulevard is Edgewater Terrace, and all the little houses which are there, and also our two neighbor houses, were there when we built. So, very little has changed.

WESCHLER: Uh-huh. Can you describe the architecture in the neighborhood when you built here and what it is today?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, there were little Spanish houses, little English houses, all these different kinds of roofs. And the water and power department owned the whole block a block from here, and then suddenly they started to sell the lots. So through some concatenation (which is an interesting story in itself), we were able to get five of the lots. And Mr. Neutra was asked to sell them for a friend of his, and he put the proviso that the owners, the clients who bought the lot, had to build a Neutra house. And for this reason, there are now eight houses, four facing Silver Lake and four in the back, facing Argent Place.

WESCHLER: So this has all become, in addition to a museum of Spanish stucco houses, also a museum of Neutra houses as well.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's right.

WESCHLER: Well, while we're sitting here looking at the bookshelves, it occurs to me that we haven't really talked

about the status of books having to do with Neutra, and maybe we could spend a little bit of time right now talking about that.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes. He has written fourteen books. His most important book is called Survival Through Design. And I think in my interviews I mentioned that it took fourteen years until he could find a publisher; finally, Oxford University Press published it. It has been translated into Italian, German, Spanish, and French. And in East Germany, an edition appeared and is now distributed in 40,000 copies, called Gestaltete Umwelt.

WESCHLER: Speaking of the East German books, you were mentioning downstairs, off tape, about a book about this house that's recently been published in East Germany.

DIONE NEUTRA: Yes, that's called Sense and Setting, and I hope very much that I shall be able to find an American publisher who will publish this book here.

WESCHLER: Have you yourself been translating that book?

DIONE NEUTRA: I am just now in the process of translating it. And I love to translate. I translated my own biography. I have written-- I have been working since 1972 on a book about Mr. Neutra's difficult beginning. And I've called it The Shaping of an Architect, and it's based on our correspondence, because we could not marry for four years, and so we had a very lively

correspondence with each other. And Mr. Neutra confided in me all his thoughts about art and life and love, and so I was initiated in the thinking of my beloved before we got married, which was very beneficial for me.

WESCHLER: So, in addition to your own music, you have been devoting a good deal of your time to composing these letters and translating them--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: --since 1970 into two books, and writing and translating.

DIONE NEUTRA: That's right. What I did was I would read our old correspondence, and then I would make a line, and my secretary would type those portions which I thought would be of interest to the general public. And then I started to translate it into English, so now I have an English copy and a German copy; the German copy is in the hands of a publisher in Germany, and the English copy is in the hands of an agent in New York, and I hope to find a publisher for it. [laughter] And I should perhaps say that it is the first volume, which deals with my husband's difficult beginning; the second volume is called Fifty Years on My Toes, not that I am a dancer, but I had to be on my toes to live up to my husband's aspirations and expectations. So this will be our love letters and our own involvement.

But both volumes go only up to 1932. But as Professor Thomas Hines is writing a book about my husband, Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture, I shall leave it to him to finish the last--the last forty years of Mr. Neutra's life. And then, when I'm dead, I'm bequeathing all my diaries to UCLA; and after all the people who are mentioned in there are also dead, then these diaries may be seen, if anybody is still interested to write a third volume. [book]

WESCHLER: It seems, with all this activity taking place, there will be something of a renewal of interest in Neutra over the next several years.

DIONE NEUTRA: I would think so, because he left a very important manuscript called Man in the Middle, on which he worked for three years before he died, and now McGraw-Hill publishing house in New York is going to publish it.* And then Professor Hines is going to publish a book, as I mentioned, and my own book. So one would imagine there would be a revival of interest.

WESCHLER: So even though you are spending a good deal of time on your music now, it would hardly be fair to say that you've dropped out of Neutra activities altogether.

DIONE NEUTRA: No, not at all. And this makes me very happy, because my husband always told me before he died,

*McGraw-Hill declined, and I have no publisher yet in February 1981.

he said, "It gives me such a comfort to know that you and my sons are going to keep on keeping my memory alive."

WESCHLER: An interesting thing happened the other day as I was leaving: as I was walking outside, there were five people standing outside--a professor and his four students--just looking at the house and just asking, "Is it possible to go inside to look?" And I said, "Just knock," and there you were. Does that happen often?

DIONE NEUTRA: That happens very often. This house is also in Dave Gebhard's guide of modern architecture [A Guide to Architecture in Southern California, coauthored by Robert Winter], so very often there are many groups here; and whenever I see them, I invite them to come in, because I feel if I'm lucky enough to live in such a beautiful house, I should share it. And I have many classes, college classes, which regularly come; they come from San Luis Obispo, and they come from--let's see--Cal Poly, Pomona, and Long Beach.

WESCHLER: Well, we're coming to the end of our sessions now. Maybe I could ask you one question we like to ask our interviewees, which is, what they thought of the process of being interviewed, what kinds of memories or thoughts they've had reviewing their lives like this.

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, this has been for me a very, very interesting time, because it forced me to read all my

diaries and relive very, very difficult parts of my life. Because Mr. Neutra had a heart attack in '49, and in '52, which resulted in changed circumstances, and at the same time he was trying to run two offices. So when I read these diaries, I thought, how in the world was I able to stand it? [laughter] If I have learned anything in life, if I can give any advice to young people, if the going is rough, don't despair but just persevere. [laughter]

WESCHLER: How do you suppose you were able to persevere? What kinds of--

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I was able to persevere, because my husband told me every day how much he loved me, and how much my help meant to him, and what a miracle woman I was that I was able to stand him. [laughter]

WESCHLER: And sometimes you agreed with that assessment of--

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, sometimes there were weeks when I couldn't stand him. [laughter] But I had promised him when we married that I wanted to make him happy. So when he saw that I was unhappy, how could I tell him that he was the reason for my unhappiness? So I just bore it by myself and got over it.

WESCHLER: Well, can you tell us a little about the horizon for you right now: what you expect to be doing with your next seven years, your next ten years?

DIONE NEUTRA: Well, I hope that I can continue improving, although I have not been very happy with my performance today, because I lost my place in the song, I lost my place in the cello playing. But, anyway, this is very good education, because you can be wonderful by yourself, but when you are doing something in public, which is for this, then you see where you still have to improve. So I intend to keep on practicing, and I hope that I am getting better and better, although at my age, seventy-seven, whether my voice will hold out has to be seen.

WESCHLER: The ambition is still there at the age of seventy-seven, apart from relaxing, to continue working harder.

DIONE NEUTRA: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. And I'm conscious of the fact that, for instance, when I travel through Europe, as I did just now, fourteen cities and three countries and thirty-five friends--

WESCHLER: How many days was that?

DIONE NEUTRA: That was forty-five days. I mean, apparently I give so much pleasure to other people with my singing and my just coming, that this also gives me a spurt to continue.

WESCHLER: Well, you've given us a great deal of pleasure today and all through these interviews, so we want to thank you.

DIONE NEUTRA: And I thank you for the opportunity.

WESCHLER: OK. Very good.

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